







## DISCIPLINED LADIES

BOOKS BY MISS REGINA SNOW

*The Feminine Régime*  
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*Happy Tears (1930s Classic of Female Discipline)*

# DISCIPLINED LADIES

*A Cornucopia of Feminine Discipline*

Edited By

MISS MARIANNE MARTINDALE



A Wildfire Club Edition

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*Miss Prism, Librarian*

by Miss Regina Snow



## *Miss Prism, Librarian*

**M**y name is Luella Mavis Chandler, and I am going to tell you about my rather unusual encounters at the library with our young librarian, Miss Prism. I suppose they're not *that* unusual by today's standards. But then, a few years ago, such things were very uncommon. I suppose it's a bit of a cheek for me to call her "our *young* librarian", because at the time she was older than I. She was, I suppose, about twenty-four, and I was just turned eighteen. That was, as I say, a few years ago. The year was 2025, to be precise, so, if you care to do the mathematics, I have told you my present age.

It was the spring of 2025 when it all began. May, it might have been. Certainly the weather was getting warmer. Miss Prism would know the exact date, because it will all be in the library records on her little computer, but I shan't ask her, because I do not know if she would approve of my telling you this story. And even now, I am extremely nervous of earning Miss Prism's disapproval. Anyway, whatever day it was, I was going into the library with a big pile of books under my arm, which I was returning. I always had big piles of books under my arm because I was the sort of girl who always has her nose in a book.

There have always been girls like me of course, and in those times when the new Government restrictions were gradually cutting down television broadcasting to the two hours a day we now all know and love, lots of children were turning back to reading as a means of entertainment.

Well, as I went into the library, there was Miss Prism sitting at her desk. There was a little bar sign at her desk which said, "Miss Prism", just like that. No name, or initial or anything. Jane Prism, her name was. At least, that was the rumour. Certainly she signed herself "J. Prism" on the little receipt slips for our fines. But no one ever called her anything but "Miss Prism" in the library. I do not think any one would have dared. She might have frozen them to death on the spot. Yes, frozen them to death. I really believe she could have done it. For she was very cold, this Miss Prism.

She had a sort of icy, or crystalline, perfection which, I must confess, I greatly admired, and still do. She had the blondest of blonde hair, most of which was pulled back sharply into one of those high pony-tails, which were so fashionable at that time, while the remainder fell over her forehead in a short fringe. You *must* remember the style. Her lips were painted in that dark red colour that looks almost black in some lights. And when I say 'painted' I mean just that. For the curve of her mouth was shaped into that perfect high-arching bow which came in a few years before I am talking about, and never seems to go out of fashion. Those lips gave her something of a painted doll appearance, and they were always so bright and glossy with lipstick that any cup she drank from, or any one she kissed, would be imprinted heavily with the deepest red.

At that time, I had just left school, and I had just begun painting my own lips. My school was very strict. Really, one of the first of the new strict schools, and not only might one not wear makeup at school, but if any prefect saw one wearing makeup even at the weekends, one would be reported the following Monday and be hauled up before the housemistress for a dose of the senior school strap, and a long detention.

So as I say, I had just started putting on lip-rouge and I took Miss Prism for one of my models. I imitated that delightfully artificial dollish style, and painted so heavily that my mouth seemed to owe nothing to nature and everything to art. The moist, scented heavy feeling that was always on my mouth fascinated me and aroused curious, unnamable sensations in my young breast.

Sometimes when I saw Miss Prism I was seized by a curious fancy, a thought that I could not remove from my mind. It was a desire to touch my rouged lips to hers, to mingle the scented richness of our two lipsticks in a clinging, female kiss. It was a most curious and nonsensical idea, as you see. But sometimes the idea of being kissed by Miss Prism—kissed full on the mouth as a boy might kiss me, and especially that meeting and merging of two immaculately-painted, richly-scented mouths, a merging that can never have taken place in real life for obviously only men and women

kiss like that—this idea, as I say, haunted me for days at a time.

The idea was doubly ridiculous, because not only was Miss Prism my own sex, and a very feminine example of it too, but also, it was quite impossible to imagine her kissing *any one*. Her lipstick was rich and dark and moistly glossy, but there was nothing intentionally sensual about that fact. It represented 'painted perfection', to be seen, but never to be touched. Never, never to be smeared or dulled from its glistening immaculacy. Her lips told one this, but her eyes even more. They were the clearest and coldest of blue eyes, which stared out from behind her round-framed scholarly spectacles, and seemed to challenge the world to speak to her on any subject more intimate than overdue books or the whereabouts of the Philosophy section.

There was yet another reason which made my fancy of kissing Miss Prism seem so manifestly absurd, even within the realm of my own imagination. And that was, that she seemed so much older and so much more authoritative than I. In a sense, it is absurd to speak of her being 'old'. There, presiding over her library in her early twenties, she seemed, in one way, almost ridiculously young with her high ponytail and her fresh-faced earnestness. Yet, at the same time, Miss Prism was one of those people to whom authority comes naturally, and who, even at the youngest age, have about them the aura of one who is to be obeyed.

Everyone knows how about one schoolmistress in ten has this natural authority. She is the one who, even back in the twentieth century, when there was no proper discipline or punishment, no one even thought of disobeying or answering back. Well, Miss Prism, even before she was twenty, was that type of girl. The silence rule was always religiously obeyed in her library, to the extent that one felt self-conscious even turning a page with too much of a rustle. And walking down the rows of shelves in a pair of those high steel-heeled shoes, which most fashionable girls wear, was a nerve-racking exercise. It could be done by walking almost on the points of one's toes but, since those shoes keep you on tiptoe even when you are standing still, the task of keeping the heels from clicking against the ground was a highly precarious one. And I once saw a very *chic* young girl miss her footing and

collapse to the ground in a noisy welter of heels, nylon-shimmering legs, dropped books and lacy petticoats, her eyes watering and her perfectly-painted face turning seven shades of vermillion beneath the sidelong glances of the other readers, and the cold, disapproving stare of Miss Prism. Really, that was the effect she had upon people. Men twice her age were terrified to breathe a word, or to lay a book down heavily, with that young pony-tailed martinet presiding over the room.

I ought to explain that ours was a middle-sized library which would, until recently, have had a staff of at least three or four to man it. But nowadays with most of the routine work being done by computers and other machines, and, with all the fuss about the aging population and the labour shortage, it is quite usual for such places to be run by one youngish girl. It nearly always is a girl of course, for now that the twentieth-century fad for women doing mens' jobs is over and fewer married women choose to work rather than look after their children properly, the positions that can be filled by females, such as those of librarian and schoolmistress, have become very largely the preserve of young to youngish girls. And Miss Prism, though I like to think she is unique in her own way, is cast very much in the mould of the new-style working girl, who often has very large responsibilities for her age and sex, such as the running of an entire library. She is not at all the brash, hard-edged, half-masculine woman-in-a-man's-world that one always sees in those dreadful films from the last decades from the twentieth century. On the contrary, she is usually pretty, fragile-looking and full of the spirit of the new femininity. For all her authoritativeness, this is certainly true of Miss Prism, whose very severity is of the most delicate and finely-cut feminine nature.

The library as I say, is fully automated and is tastefully done in the New Style: none of the dreadful plastic-looking or raw metal shelves and pieces of equipment they used to have in the late 20th century. Most of the furnishings are in rich, dark colours or else in those wonderful new materials that so closely resemble the finest of tropical hardwoods. The ceilings are vaulted in that charming Art-Neo style which cynics say is a cross between an

Indian temple and an Art Deco cinema, but which looks so much more beautiful and human than the old style of municipal building. The shelving is also Art-Neo in style, and in a rich, warm brown. The carpets are in an Indian pattern and, needless to say, do not go from wall to wall in the dreadful old style. The books are replaced on the shelves by a silent conveyor device working from behind in between each double shelf, a device so cunning that it can read the spines of the books and sort them into order. All this of course, is controlled by Miss Prism from the computer at her desk. Naturally, there is no primitive display of raw computer hardware as there was in the old days. The computer is evidenced only by a small wooden box fixed on Miss Prism's desk, with a small microphone mounted on a slender brass Art Neo-style stand into which she speaks her commands to the system, and a small slot which receives her hand-written notes and returns neatly-printed cards with any information she may have requested displayed in tasteful Baskerville type.

So you see Miss Prism is the absolute mistress of her library. No one else is involved in the running of it, except the occasional maintenance man, and sometimes a young girl assistant on busy days who is ordered in and dismissed by Miss Prism at her absolute discretion. I rather fancy that the nature of her position has added greatly to the natural authority of her character. Certainly I know that as a child it increased the awe and respect with which I and the other children held her.

The Junior Library was in a separate room from the adult one, but both were overlooked by Miss Prism's desk, rather in the way that the bar of a public house may serve more than one room. The atmosphere of the Junior Library was even more hushed and tense than that of the Senior, for Miss Prism believed in keeping the children firmly in order. Her sharp commands of "Silence, please!" were enough to terrify most children into submission. But where the noise continued for a moment after her command, or where some other offence had been committed, Miss Prism would call the culprits to her desk, make them place their hands upon its surface, and rap them sharply with her ruler. These raps were by no means as innocuous as they may sound.

For one thing, she used a special eighteen inch ruler which had a lot of spring in it, and for another, Miss Prism had perfected the technique of delivering her strokes in such a way as to produce the maximum sting. It was almost an art with her. One stroke on each hand was hard to bear, but six strokes, which she sometimes gave, could not be endured with complacency, even by the most robust sixteen year old, and I have often seen a gangling boy or girl saunter away from her desk trying to pretend complete unconcern, but with very pink cheeks and lips tightly compressed. Perhaps the hardest thing to bear, after the stinging itself, was the demure little smile of prim satisfaction which always forced its way to Miss Prism's normally unexpressive countenance after the administration of such chastisement.

I heard a story once, of how a lower-class father had stormed into the library after his fifteen year old daughter had come to him in tears telling tales about her punishment. The man had raged at Miss Prism in a most ungentlemanly fashion, whereupon the young librarian, without troubling to look up from her work, said, in her most maddeningly bureaucratic voice, "If you have any complaint concerning my conduct of my office, you must take it to the library committee. I am not empowered to reprimand or otherwise discipline myself. Therefore complaints to me are valueless. It is also my duty to inform you that you are breaking the silence rule and that, if you continue to do so, I must have you removed." The man *did* take his complaint to the library committee where he was bluntly informed by the chairman that he was still living in the twentieth century, that attitudes had moved on since his day and that no sane person could possibly imagine that a good dose of the ruler across the hands for making a noise in the library would do a growing girl anything but good.

But I must not get lost in my reminiscences about Miss Prism. I am supposed to be telling you about that particular day in May, am I not? I came in with my pile of books under my arm. Miss Prism was at the wall behind her desk, reaching up to fetch something. I noticed, as I often had, how perfectly straight were the seams of her stockings. I always wished that I could keep mine quite so straight. In my mind's eye I followed the seams up un-



derneath Miss Prism's tight skirt which was just below knee length. Miss Prism's well-shaped legs and perfect stockings are another thing that have long fascinated me. Like most fashionable girls she wears the very sheerest nylon stockings, which, when off, feel like a gossamer mist, and when on, are like a sheeny, shimmering film over the legs. Often, when the librarian has sat cross-legged at her chair, I have wished I might catch a glimpse of the upper reaches of those finely filmed legs above the knee, perhaps even to the point where the sheer nylon darkens into the welt of the stocking top, or even higher, where the stocking top is caught and stretched by the pull of the suspender, and the pale thigh swells above the containment of the subtle nylon. The most I have ever managed however, is a glimpse of her dimpled knee and a flounce of her frothy white lace petticoat.

I often think it must be piquant for men that now that all girls wear the most exquisite stockings and those awful frumpy old stretch tights have finally gone the way of long combinations. The girls are so well dressed and so well behaved that the chances of seeing anything above a knee are rare indeed for an unmarried man. Thanks to my curious feelings for our charming Miss Prism, I am in the unusual, if not unique, position for a girl, of knowing something of the male frustration in this matter from personal experience. I must confess that it is not without its charm and I often hope that men may experience the same frustration in the presence of my own legs. I often have this in mind as I carefully smooth my hem over my knee in an omnibus.

Miss Prism sat down and crossed her legs with a most exquisitely tantalising decorum. My books were overdue. They usually were, so I was slightly nervous of the librarian's cold disapproval. At the same time, I was feeling rather independent and grown-up, because this was only my second visit to the Senior Library. I knew for one thing that I should never again come away from the librarian's desk with my hands smarting from that long, expertly-handled ruler. Not that Miss Prism *did* use the ruler for overdue books, she just charged the standard fine laid down in the library regulations. I put down my books and she examined them.

"Overdue, Miss Chandler," she commented. "Not a good beginning to your membership of the Senior Library."

I felt hot and uncomfortable. My grown-upness seemed to be slipping away from me. Miss Prism shook her head slightly, her pony-tail swinging behind her, as if in light-hearted counterpoint to the gravity of her demeanour. How perfect she was! It was *something* to be called "Miss Chandler" by her, like a proper reader, instead of just "Luella".

"All overdue, Miss Chandler?" she said, as she concluded her examination. "And *long* overdue too. That will be three shillings and sixpence."

I was shocked. In the Junior Library, the fines rarely rose to over a penny-ha'penny a book. I had no idea the Senior fines were so much higher. Of course it was all there on the notice by the desk, and in the printed plates in the books, but whoever reads those? The new re-valued Imperial money had not long been introduced and three and six was the price of a reasonable meal in a restaurant. Of course it is worth more now, with continual deflation, but even then, it was more than I could manage. For I was still living with my parents and nearly always spent my allowance on clothes, makeup and stockings as soon as I got it, leaving meals and tickets and things for my gentlemen friends to pay. I fumbled in my purse, my brow damp and my throat growing so dry that I did not know how I should speak. Finally, I managed to say, "I'm terribly sorry, Miss Prism, but I'm afraid I have only one and sevenpence."

I do not know what I expected Miss Prism to say, but what she did say took me completely by surprise. "Give me your one and sevenpence then and I shall make up the rest of the fine myself."

"Oh, but Miss Prism," I began.

"Silence, please!" Miss Prism took a little slip of paper and began to write on it with her elegant little black and gold fountain pen. I was not sure whether I should go or not. I felt not. In a few moments, she blotted the sheet, folded it in two and gave it to me with the comment, "By Wednesday, please. In your fairest hand."

Somehow I felt constrained from reading it in front of her. I suppose it was a receipt for my one and seven and a note of my debt to the librarian, which must be paid by Wednesday. I was a little unnerved, partly because of the unexpectedness of the thing and partly because I was a little afraid to borrow the money from my parents. I had only just received my allowance of fifteen shillings, and my fecklessness at spending all of my money as soon as I got it was a sore point with the family. For a moment I had thought that Miss Prism was actually *paying* the fine for me, and though nonplussed, I must confess I was relieved.

While choosing my books, I did not read my note because, like all the readers, I felt that I was constantly under Miss Prism's eye in her library. On the way home I did not read it either. I can hardly say why. Somehow the streets and omnibuses seemed profane places to open a billet which was impregnated with the cool scent of Miss Prism and the calm, official strictness of her bookish sanctuary. I did not open it in front of my parents either. So it was not until I had retired to my room that I finally unfolded the little official slip.

It took me some minutes to digest its full significance. The first few lines were a receipt for my full fine of three shillings and sixpence printed in the neat, tasteful lettering of the library computer. Beneath this, in Miss Prism's neat, small hand were the words, "Dear Miss Chandler, You will write the following line two hundred times. 'Punctuality is the courtesy of kings. I must learn to be prompt and punctual with my dealings with the library and in life in general.'"

Perhaps I am a bit slow, but as I say, it took me some minutes to understand what had happened. Miss Prism had paid most of my fine. She did not want to be paid back, but she did want me to write out two hundred lines for her as an alternative punishment. Why she should want this was something of a mystery. Perhaps she took pity on my inability to pay the fine, but wanted to make sure that I would not make a habit of throwing myself on her mercy. Perhaps her sense of justice demanded that I should be punished for my offence against library discipline, or perhaps, she just liked playing the schoolmistress. Whatever it may have

been, my predominant feeling was one of gratitude. My family was not in one of its happier moods and the thought of applying for extra funds and thus giving it an excuse to turn its collective spleen upon me was not an inviting one.

I got out some sheets of foolscap paper left over from my very recent schooldays and began work on my lines straight away. I ruled a margin and headed the page, "Two hundred lines for Miss Prism", with the date and my name just as we did in school. It was a long line and I tried to keep my handwriting neat without going too slowly. By midnight I had only done just over half so I decided to finish them tomorrow.

When I woke up the next morning with nearly a hundred long lines still hanging over me, I must confess that I felt a shade less grateful to Miss Prism. I had always hated doing lines at school. They made me bored and fidgety and uncomfortable. But I rarely had more than a hundred at a time and they were never so dreadfully long. I did not have the heart to sit down and tackle them all at once so I did them in silly little bits; six here, a dozen there, three or four at another time. The wretched task seemed to blight the whole day, though I knew it was mainly my own fault for taking such a silly attitude to it. I had often made school punishments and homework exercises twice as bad for myself in this way. But the irksome thing was that I had only yesterday been congratulating myself upon how I should never again have to go through the treadmill of school tasks.

The next day was Wednesday and I dutifully took my completed imposition to the library. I was feeling again grateful to Miss Prism, pleased with myself for having done her task on time, and generally rather glowy about the whole position of affairs.

It seemed to form a little bond between us, a bond forged of the very stuff of Miss Prism's prim, painstaking neatly-regulated world. Oh, that does sound patronising, I know, but I did admire that world and knew that it represented all sorts of things that my lazy, scatter-brained nature could never aspire to. There was a definite part of me that wanted to be like Miss Prism.

The librarian was sitting cross-legged at her desk. I placed my work before her.

"My lines, miss," I said, just as if she had been a schoolmistress. She picked them up in an entirely business-like way, just as if they had been returned books. She looked over the pages for a moment or two. A frown passed over her face, followed by a little smile, that satisfied little smile that she could never suppress when she had used her ruler to maximum effect. She uncrossed her legs with a slight swish of nylon on nylon, and then, in the same matter-of-fact way, tore my work neatly in two and dropped it into the wastepaper basket at her high-heeled feet.

"Not neat enough," she said. "You will repeat the punishment. Bring it back at nine o'clock tomorrow morning, and do not be late."

I left the library close to tears. The thought of doing all that writing again was almost unbearable. I wondered what would happen if I just did not do it. But I knew I should never have the courage to go back to the library if I did that, and, in my present financial state, I was rather dependent on the library. Gradually, I managed to reconcile myself to my fate. It was really my own fault I supposed. Doing the second half in bits and pieces like that had probably made the work rather uneven and raggedy. In fact, I knew it had. This time I made up my mind to sit down and do the punishment properly, straight through.

I began to write out the long sentence over and over again. At first it felt rather satisfying as the neat, rounded version of my usually casual and untidy handwriting covered the page. But, of course, it went on and on, and on. I tried to speed up my writing with as little loss of neatness as possible. Even so, it took me the best part of four hours. Finally, I laid down my pen feeling that I had done a presentable imposition, and quite looked forward to taking it in the next day.

I went to the library promptly at nine a.m. Miss Prism was at her usual place, wearing an unusually light-toned pair of stockings which made her legs look almost, but not quite, naked. She took my work and looked over it with a benign smile.

"This is *much* better, Miss Chandler," she said approvingly. She tore it in half again. "But not quite neat enough to satisfy me." She smiled as the impact of her words sunk in, and then said;

"Since I have twice been obliged to reject your work, I am afraid the punishment is doubled. You will now write four hundred lines."

I groaned inwardly. The punishment seemed unending. But Miss Prism had still a further surprise for me.

"I think you had better work under supervision today. Take a seat over there."

She indicated a little chair and table set at the end of an aisle of bookshelves. There was one at the end of each aisle where readers might study. I sat down, and felt immediately rather trapped. I could see nothing but the surface of the desk and the wall, except by turning my head, and realised that I was kept in this position until Miss Prism chose to dismiss me. Unless I should have the courage to rebel, which I knew I never should. I remembered how long it had taken me last time, and reflected upon the fact that the task was now doubled. I considered how early in the day it was. I supposed that if she chose to, Miss Prism could keep me here all day until closing time.

As these reflections were passing through my mind, Miss Prism returned and placed some sheets of lined foolscap paper in front of me, and on top of that, a freshly-sharpened pencil. I could see nothing of her but her manicured hands and her forearms and her neat, small wrist-watch, for she was standing beside and slightly behind me. I caught her warm, sweet scent in my nostrils and was somehow reminded of being a very small child at school. Perhaps Miss Prism was aware of this atmosphere too, for she said, in a gentle voice, as if speaking to a young child; "Do not begin until you are told." She returned to her desk, and I imagined her behind me, crossing her filmed legs beneath her demure skirt. I waited for what seemed like several minutes. I noticed that the sheaf of papers looked quite thick and guessed that Miss Prism had calculated the exact number of pages I should need to cover with slow, careful handwriting.

It struck me that I should need to work even more slowly and carefully than before, if I was not to have my task rejected again. What would happen then? The length and tedium of the punishment began to feel quite oppressive, and Miss Prism was not even

letting me begin. Suddenly, a crystal voice cut the air making me start in the silence of the library.

“Miss Chandler, you may commence.”

I was horrified. How could she announce my shame to the whole library like that? Of course they would not know exactly what was happening, but what *would* they think? I picked up my pencil in a state of numbness. I was almost *too* shocked to begin, but the terror of that clear voice delivering a public reprimand, and perhaps revealing the true nature of my task, overcame everything else. I wrote my name and the date carefully, roundly, taking about a minute on each word. It looked very neat, but at this rate I should be working here all day for a *week*.

I began to develop a better rhythm, though still progressing slowly and carefully, and all the time my cheeks were burning with embarrassment, my head felt hot and my heart was pounding. There were not many people in the library; an old man who seemed to read the newspapers all day; a young mother with her two toddlers. I'm not sure who else for I could not see. I half-wanted to turn round and see if anyone was staring at me. But I was constrained from doing so, both by my embarrassment and my awe of Miss Prism.

Gradually, I heard the library filling up and more and more people moving about. It is surprising how much noise people make when they are being silent, and I am sure one never hears it so much as when one is unable to look. The people now seemed to me to possess an enviable and almost miraculous freedom. They could walk into the library and leave when they wished. They could saunter about the shelves, looking at the books, picking them up, putting them down, choosing them, rejecting them, doing just whatever they pleased, while all the time all I could do was write out the same long sentence, slowly and carefully, again and again and again. The time before I had begun seemed almost like a dream, and the time when I could finally put down my pencil seemed so far away as to be almost beyond consideration.

After a time I heard a crisp, high-heeled step approaching behind me, and Miss Prism told me to put my pencil down. She

picked up my work and I sat for some minutes in tense silence. Would she reject it? Would she expose me to the library? She replaced the papers before me saying quietly, "Much better". After this I felt calmer and less embarrassed. After all, to the other readers I was just a girl quietly getting on with some studying in the corner of the library. The disadvantage of this was that as I became less tense and nervous, I became more bored and frustrated. I had now been writing for two hours, and the pile of unwritten-on paper seemed very little smaller than it had been at nine o'clock. My fingers itched with irritation and I had an impatient feeling in the pit of my stomach, but I forced myself to continue, increasing the pace just a little but keeping the neat, round rhythm as far as possible.

After about three-quarters of an hour Miss Prism checked my work again.

"You have been doing well so far," she said. "But these last few pages are getting a little hasty. Now, if I were feeling kind I should let you rewrite just those last few pages, but I fear I am not." Wherewith she tore my work in half and walked crisply back to the desk for more paper.

Resentment died into heavy-hearted resignation as I wrote my name and the date once more at the top of a virgin sheet of paper. Luncheon time came and when the library had emptied, Miss Prism came over once more.

"I was going to give you a break for lunch, Miss Chandler, but you now have *so* much work to catch up with that I fear you must continue with your punishment while I go to lunch. You are to stay exactly where you are, and not to stand up, or turn round, or stop writing for a moment. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, miss," I replied. I heard her steel-heeled steps receding and the library door click shut. It occurred to me that I was probably locked in. She would not have left the library unlocked. It was a peculiar feeling, being alone in the library. I kept writing, but probably because I had been told not to, the desire to turn round grew upon me. I felt afraid to do so. Perhaps Miss Prism had not really left. Perhaps she was still sitting silently at her desk, waiting to pounce upon me if I should move. It was an absurd notion, of



course. But it was perhaps an indication of how far my morning's punishment had removed me from the world of everyday reality.

After several minutes solid writing I plucked up my courage and turned my head. Miss Prism's desk was, of course, empty, as was the entire library. I leaned back in my chair, flooded with an exquisite sense of relief. I rested my hand and back for a moment, and then decided that since I was really alone I might stand up and stretch my legs. It was really very naughty and disobedient of me I know, but I have always been a little bit like that. It was just what I should have done at school. In any case, it would only be for a minute and no one would know. So I stood up and walked about a little. My clicking heels sounded deafening in the silence. I felt sure that they could be heard a block away. I nearly sat straight down again but by now it was almost like a dare with myself. Dare I walk to the other end of the library and back? Yes.

I walked to the furthest bookshelf. If Miss Prism returned now there would be no chance of getting back into place with my noisy heels. I removed my shoes and walked in my stockinged feet. I took first one book and then another, and looked at a few pages. All the time my heart was pounding, lest the door should suddenly open. Finally, I scurried back to my desk, put on my shoes and resumed my punishment.

I need not have worried. Miss Prism was another ten minutes before returning. She came to my desk and inspected my work.

"Still much better," she said. "I trust you have been a good girl and have stayed sitting at your desk all the time I was away."

I said nothing.

"Well, Miss Chandler, have you?"

I panicked. Perhaps she had heard me. Perhaps her computer could tell. I dared not fib.

"Not quite, miss."

"What do you mean by 'not quite', Miss Chandler. Do you mean that you have deliberately disobeyed my strict instructions?"

"Yes, miss."

"Very well." Her voice was calm and satisfied, as it was when she used the ruler. "You will remain behind after the library closes."

es, Miss Chandler, and you shall *suffer* the consequences of disobedience." She laid a particular stress upon the word "suffer" which sent a shiver through me.

The afternoon dragged by, even more painfully than the morning, with me slowly writing out my line again and again as the readers came, chose their books and went about their business. All the time I was wondering how Miss Prism intended to make me suffer. More lines, perhaps? I did not think so. The ruler? That seemed unlikely too, though I often clung to the hope that it might be just that.

Sometimes I tried to dismiss the matter lightly from my mind. She's only a little pony-tailed library girl. What can she *really* do to me? At other times, I sank into abject dread. It was rather like waiting outside the headmistress's study. And all the time, I was grinding out that weary line over and over again. And all the time it became clearer that I should be nowhere near finished by closing time. At first, I wished the time would go more quickly, but in the last two hours I was wishing the hands of the clock would freeze in their tracks.

Slowly, but steadily, closing time crept nearer, and at last Miss Prism rang her bell and the readers began to depart. It seemed an age before the last reader left, and the library door closed with a click of chilling finality. Now, I thought, the moment of reckoning had come.

But I was wrong. Miss Prism took no notice of me. From the slight sounds behind me I guessed she was moving about, doing whatever it is that librarianettes do after the library has closed. I went on with my writing, slowly and carefully. I had done perhaps two-thirds of the work. Finally, Miss Prism said: "Stand up, Miss Chandler."

I rose to my feet.

"Turn round."

I turned to face her. She was wearing a flared pleated skirt, and had removed her tight double-breasted jacket. She was wearing a white blouse through which one could see the tracery of her black lace brassiere. I noticed that her small, pointed breasts rose and fell rather rapidly.

"I trust you've had an enjoyable day, Miss Chandler."

I said: "Thank you, miss." I could not think what else to say.

"And plenty of homework left over to keep you out of mischief. Good. But there is this small matter of disobedience. Is there not?"

"Yes, miss."

"You will regret that, Miss Chandler."

Without another word, she stepped into her store cupboard and emerged carrying a long, thin crook-handled cane of a type used in schools. I felt a shock run through my body.

"Have you ever been caned, Miss Chandler?" asked Miss Prism.

"No, miss," I answered.

I had been punished often enough at school with lines, or sometimes the strap. But the cane was a rare punishment given only for the most serious offences. The announcement that a girl was to be caned was a major event calculated to send a *frisson* of fear and excitement through the whole class. Mischievous as I was, I had never done anything to deserve the cane.

The sudden realisation that I was about to experience the dreaded punishment at last went through me like an electric shock. Miss Prism flexed the cane in her hands, bending it into a semi-circle and letting it spring back.

"You are about to receive a punishment you will not forget, Miss Chandler. Bend over and hold your ankles."

I did so. It was a little hard in my tight skirt. I felt the fabric straining against my bottom and thighs and knew that the outline of my knickers and suspenders must be plainly visible. I also knew, from school gossip, that canings were usually taken bent over a desk or a chair, and that touching one's toes or holding one's ankles was positively the worst way to receive a caning.

"Deliberate disobedience," said Miss Prism. "Six of the best, Miss Chandler."

I saw her skirt swing as she drew back the cane. It hissed through the air, and struck me, causing a sensation of pain more intense than any I could remember. I longed to jump up, but I dared not. Miss Prism's skirt swung again. I caught a hint of her

layered petticoats. Again the cane bit into me and everything left my mind except the pain. Miss Prism's heels clicked as she shifted her position slightly. The cumulative pain of the third stroke seemed unbearable.

"Stop! Please stop," I cried. I could not help myself.

"Silence, please!" said Miss Prism.

Somehow I endured the rest of my punishment, and was instructed to stand up, which I did, tearful and trembling. Miss Prism smiled gently.

"Do you think you will forget that lesson, Miss Chandler?"

"No, miss."

"Good. And now there is the matter of your unseemly outcry during the punishment. You may have three more strokes of the cane, or, I will give you another punishment which, I warn you, will not be light. Which do you chose?"

"Oh, not the cane again! Another punishment."

"Very well. You will return to your desk and tear up today's work one page at a time. You will return here at nine a.m. tomorrow and at nine a.m. every day until the punishment is finished. It is now doubled to eight hundred lines. If I have to reject any of them, you will remain behind after the library closes. Good evening, Miss Chandler."



*Induction Week at Boniton*

by Celia Grant



## *Induction Week at Boniton*

**T**he decades-old system at Boniton Ladies College for girls of thirteen to twenty years old had ensured that Emma Vane-Perkins knew exactly what was required of her. There was no need for Miss Cholmondeley to instruct her. After she had exchanged "Good afternoons" with her new housemistress, Emma took off her tailored winter blazer and hung it up behind the door on the spare coat-hanger thoughtfully provided for the purpose. Without further ado, Emma walked directly to the right hand side of the famous Chesterfield sofa and bent over the padded arm. The leather cover ensured comfort and flexibility, whilst the English oak beneath provided stability and balance. Remembering the directions of her mentor during Induction Week, she reached out for one of the plump velvet cushions which lay within reach and placed it under her. This raised a girl's seat to the mistress's preferred position, some forty-five degrees to the arm.

Miss Cholmondeley crossed her spacious living room to the cane cupboard, which was no longer within Emma's restricted field of vision. Yet for her part, Miss Cholmondeley could see Emma quite clearly in the cupboard's glass doors, polished daily by the maid. For the moment, the girl's pleated navy-blue skirt easily covered her bottom, although the hem, raised up and slightly away from her legs by virtue of Emma's position, only reached a point between the tops of her stockings and the backs of her knees. The housemistress smiled faintly. From the overly-conscientious way in which this new sixth-former was retaining her disciplined position, she rather suspected that the girl's mentor had warned her of the reflected view. An Old Bonitonian herself, Miss Cholmondeley well remembered her own experiences of Induction Week, both as student and as mentor. Since then, the main system had remained the same; only the details of what had to be learnt had changed.

But what Miss Cholmondeley could not know, despite her considerable experience, was that Emma Vane-Perkins was

confident that she would be rising from her position within seconds. Uncaned.

"Look," Emma's mentor, Carmen, had said, bossily, at their first meeting. "Every mistress has her own ways and after her first week here, every girl is expected to know them all. And if she gets it wrong—doesn't know where Miss Fenton keeps her slipper, say—then the mentor gets the whacking! As well as, I might add, not instead of, the silly girl herself! So we'll start at the top, and for goodness' sake concentrate. Here's what you have to do if you ever hear Doc Beaumont use her stock speech which ends, "After consultation with your housemistress, I have decided to award you twelve strokes of the Governess Cane. . ."

Emma, an intelligent girl with a healthy sense of self preservation, concentrated. But after a while, her thoughts drifted back to the day of her arrival when her brief visit to Doctor Olivia Beaumont, Boniton's long-standing headmistress, had left her with a fixed determination not to be called there for disciplinary purposes. Although the lady herself could not have been more welcoming, Emma found her own eyes frequently straying to the right of the window seat overlooking the beautiful, beech-lined, gravel drive which had provided new girls, from the nineteenth century onwards, with their first view of Boniton.

To the left of the seat stood the cricket bat with which the then Miss Beaumont had made the first of her five centuries for England. To the right stood the heavy-duty Governess Cane which, since her elevation to the headship, had been reserved by Dr. Beaumont for her exclusive use. Emma shivered at the thought of ever feeling it across her bottom, and brought her attention back to the task in hand.

For about an hour a day, usually between tea and prep, mentor Carmen and pupil Emma went about their business. The catechism of expected punishments and positions ranged from the dreaded visit to Dr. Beaumont's study, which entailed kneeling on the seat of a padded chair, to talking after lights outs (turning the bedding back and putting your pillows under your tummy, to help the dormitory prefect smack the seat of your nightdress,



which *officially* was never pulled up to reveal the knickers).

Walking the grounds in their winter cloaks, or lying by the fire in the Sixth Form room, or sitting on their adjoining beds in the dormitory, the two girls, with their very different personalities but identical self-interests, became reluctantly inseparable.

Emma Vane-Perkins, a clever, sometimes over-confident girl of eighteen, who had entered Boniton directly into the Sixth Form, absorbed her mentor's lessons well, a fact for which Carmen was grateful. Last term, Carmen's own best friend, who was also called Emma, had had to go over the back of matron's chair for a strapping on the seat of her knickers, after her wretched pupil had failed to raise her skirts without being asked. Her present tuition of Emma was Carmen's first experience of being a mentor—it was the beginning of the Easter term and, unlike most of her classmates, she had not been entrusted with the task in the Christmas term, when most new girls started at Boniton. Her housemistress, Miss Cholmondeley, had not thought her ready for such a responsibility at that time.

The mentor-pupil relationship between the two girls was complicated by their being of similar age, as well as the fact of Emma being the brighter—and generally the better—of the two. Yet, although Carmen had never mentioned it, Emma well knew that, during the Induction Week, pupils could be disciplined by their mentors. It was a senior girl's first school opportunity to learn about punishment. That was why a First Former was allocated to her elder sister, if she had one, for this purpose, as their mothers would have been likely to have already delegated bottom-smackings by hand—all that was permitted to mentors—during the holidays.

Carmen had no younger sister and so had as yet given no hand-spankings. She hoped to become a prefect, at the very least, whilst at Boniton and have plenty of further chances to give punishments. As it was, Carmen was certainly looking forward to the traditional test which a mentor gave her pupil at the end of Induction Week with its possibilities of punishment for any lapses of memory.

"Right, Emma. Easy one to start with. Where does Miss Fenton keep her slipper?"

"It depends which room she is in—it's kept on the desk in her form room, on the window sill of her study—and in the left-hand side cupboard of the sideboard in her drawing room."

"Yes, but do you fetch it automatically?"

"No. Only if she says she's going to spank you. Otherwise, it's a caning, and she carries her cane with her everywhere she goes. Either way, you touch your toes. And hope that she doesn't make any further preparations," Emma unwisely added, without being asked.

"Oh very clever, Emma Vane-Perkins. I think we'll have to call you Vain Emma."

"Sorry, Car."

"Don't call me that. Only my friends can call me that."

So far as Emma could establish, Emma Fingleton, a naughty trouble-making girl, was the nearest Carmen came to having even one friend.

"Now, you're in Ma Wellesley's Wednesday afternoon detention, and you're called out to the front. What do you do when you get there?"

Emma, tall, willowy and fair, looked evenly across at her mentor. They had gone to their dormitory for the necessary peace and quiet. It was always deserted on Sunday afternoons. She wasn't going to let this girl worry her. She answered steadily.

"As I'm left-handed, I hold out my right hand. And stand with my back to the class."

"No! *Wednesday afternoon*, not *Saturday morning*! If you get this wrong, I'll be called in from the lacrosse field. in my short skirt, and bottle-greens."

"Sorry, just joshing. I do know, honestly. Round to the back of her desk, bend over, hands round the front struts, eyes on the class."

"For?"

"Let's see—six strokes of the senior cane. She turns up your skirt, but leaves your petticoat down. And I do see what you mean about being called in from lacrosse. Sorry." Emma began

to feel uneasy for she realised that she had been unwise to annoy her mentor.

"I jolly well bet you are. Now what's the problem with a tanning from Vanessa Vanboro'? Particularly for you, I might add."

All Emma knew about Vanessa Vanborough was that she was head girl of Nelson House. Short in height, small in stature, inviolable tradition decreed that she could only spank, and not cane or strap, girls from other Houses. Carmen and Emma were in Wellington House.

"Well, the good news is that she can only spank us. But for some reason, she only uses the 'over the knee' position sitting on a hard-backed chair——"

Most of the senior girls, like the mistresses, gave themselves the option, at least, of a desk, table, chair, or sofa arm for this purpose. Failing that, they would normally seat themselves on a sofa, or well back on a bed in order to give the punished girl some support.

Carmen interrupted Emma's recital, shifting on to the side of her bed.

"You won't find it such good news when you're in her room,"—Vanessa's position as head girl meant that she had a room to herself, rather than a mere dormitory—"bent across her knee, considering her offer to choose between hairbrush and shoe-tree. Last term," Carmen sniggered unfeelingly, "after my friend Emma started a snowball fight with some girls from Nelson House, Vanessa made her lay out a semi-circle of chairs in her room for every prefect in her house to watch. She sat herself down in the middle, settled poor Em into position with a super view of her carpet, and said she'd begin with three of each to help her decide.

"But you've still not answered the question. What's your problem going to be if—when—you're across Vanessa's lap?"

For the first time, Emma found herself at a loss. Surely they hadn't covered this? From her bed, she looked across at Carmen with some unease. Carmen undid the button of the right arm-sleeve on her pristine white blouse, and took off her watch strap. Emma's face went as white as her own blouse.

"Come, come, Emma," Carmen said pleasantly. "Imagine yourself over *Vanessa's* knee. Now what's the problem?"

Emma stared back. Inspiration would not come.

Carmen sat well forward on the bed, straightened her back, and smoothed her skirt carefully over her knees, whilst slowly rolling up her right sleeve. "I'm going to let my friend Emma watch this. I told her if she waited outside, she might get the chance to watch you get your come-uppance. And for your information, the answer is that as you're about a foot taller than Vanessa, and it's up to you to keep in the right position, you'd better have a good sense of balance.

"Em? *Em!* Come and watch me give my very first smacked botty—the first of many, I hope, even though it's only going to be a hand-spanking. Come on, pupil, let's get you in position before she comes. Across my knee with you—don't make me put you over. Toes and fingers on the carpet, I think."

Emma's namesake arrived just as the inexperienced Carmen at last succeeded in securing the back of Emma's skirt above the waistband of her petticoat

She burst out, "I say, Car, come on! Smack her on the seat of the knickers and make her count out a round dozen, at the very least!"

Emma counted as the firm blows landed, till finally: "Ow! Twelve! Thank, thank you, Carmen."

At least she hadn't cried, a lack of tears which Emma Fingleton lost no time in attributing to Carmen's inefficiency. As the soundly-spanked pupil straightened up from her mentor's knees, she mentally swore revenge on both the other girls.

Miss Cholmondeley opened the mullioned window of her cane cupboard. The spring sunshine set off the shiny beeswax coatings to perfection—she could almost see the cricket field reflected in them! Then she remembered the purpose of the girl's visit and frowned. Such behaviour was not encouraged at Boniton, and any eighteen year-old should know it, however recent her arrival. Without hesitation, she unclipped 'Marianne'—the second springiest and second longest of her set of five canes—from the

springs which held it to the back of the cupboard. Holding it by the crook handle, she turned and, as was her custom, walked to a point directly behind the miscreant, holding the rod parallel to the carpet, with the tip between finger and thumb of her left hand.

"Emma, you are to be disciplined in what is only the beginning of your second week at Boniton. You will now state to me the set punishment for this most serious offence. I shall then reprimand you before administering it."

Emma clutched the velvet pillow with both hands, only too aware of the sight which confronted her housemistress.

"The punishment is three strokes of the cane spaced evenly across the seat of a girl's skirt, Miss Cholmondeley."

The housemistress compressed her lips, and for the first time, swished the cane.

"That is not correct. I will now give you one last opportunity to state your punishment accurately."

Emma closed her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Miss Cholmondeley. Please don't punish Carmen. It's my fault. She told me very clearly. I've just remembered. It's four strokes."

The housemistress breathed angrily.

"This is outrageous. The punishment for cutting prep is ten strokes. On the seat of the knickers, with the skirt and petticoats lifted. As you are about to discover."

Miss Cholmondeley stood her rod against the side of the sofa back and grimly reached for the hem of Emma's skirt.

"May I have permission to speak, Miss Cholmondeley?"

Emma said it straight into the pillow, for all she had been rehearsing this moment since she first evolved her plan.

"Yes, you may." The mistress did not pause in her task.

"I've been sent to you for walking in the Upper Form Quad, miss."

Her words came out as a squawk, and Emma wasn't acting.

Miss Cholmondeley, who had already exposed Emma's stocking tops and the hem of her maroon knickers, completed the task automatically, her mind still on the task ahead. In recent years, she had given up her early method of laying the stick gently across

that line of the girl's seat intended for the fall of the next stroke. Instead, it was her practice to steady the cane some inches from its target before raising it. Then, as she never tired of telling her junior mistresses during their induction weeks, she drove the rod as though the sofa arm, and not the girl's bottom, were the object of punishment.

"Walking in the Upper Form Quad? My diary specifically states that you are due to see me at this time for cutting prep."

Without a word, Miss Cholmondeley walked over to her desk. For what seemed an age, Emma lay suspended in silence over the sofa arm, her highly-polished shoes touching each other on the inside rims, toes just brushing the carpet. Gravity kept her skirts neatly down over her back, where her mistress had folded them, just clear of the elasticated waistband of her knickers. She retained her hold on the pillow, marvelling at the comfort afforded her by the padded scroll. Unknown to her, her suspender clips reflected in the sunlight.

In fact it was only a matter of seconds before Miss Cholmondeley found the entry. 6:00 pm, Monday, April 27th, 1952: standard punishment for cutting prep—there it was in black and white—Emma *Fingleton!* Carmen's friend, not her pupil.

"I see. I should be seeing Emma Fingleton for that offence. But why have you come at this time?"

"I came the moment the Upper Sixth-Former ordered me to, Miss Cholmondeley. She said to come straight away."

A reluctant knock was heard at the imposing panelled door. The housemistress looked at her watch. It was exactly six minutes past six.

"Is that you, Emma Fingleton?"

"Ye-es, miss."

"Wait until I call you. In the meantime, stand facing the wall. Round the corner, where the junior girls can see you as they go to prep. If Mrs. Wellesley arrives to take it before I call you, my compliments to her, and I would be most obliged if she would commence proceedings by putting you across her knee in front of them, telling them why you were waiting for me, and that you were late—and then giving you a good spanking."

"Ye-es, Miss Cholmondeley."

"A *good* spanking, Emma!"

Not for nothing had Hermione Cholmondeley been appointed head of her house. Minor crises she could take in her stride. Having dealt with Emma Fingleton for the moment, she turned her attention back to this less routine matter of the other, new, Emma.

"Emma Vane-Perkins, the punishment for your comparatively minor offence is detention. Why were you expecting—why did you assume the posture for—corporal punishment?"

Inspired, Emma remained silent.

"I see. You are protecting your mentor who misinformed you. Out of carelessness, I hope, for her sake. There is no need to speak. Stand up. Turn round to me. Lower, and then straighten, your skirts. You are excused punishment for walking in the quad. Please go and find Carmen and tell her to come to my room immediately."

Emma walked to the door, quickly brushing the seat of her pleated skirt into position. It had *worked*! Knowing when her namesake was expected for her caning, her clever mind had seen the opportunity for revenge, seconds after that Upper Sixth Former had—at last, after several attempts at being discovered—found her in the quad. It would have been well worth a mere detention, even if Cholmondeley hadn't let her off. And the rest of her poetically-just revenge might be even better than planned. Not only would Carmen be beaten for—apparently wilfully—failing as her mentor, but her friend Emma might get a spanking for being late, as well as a caning for cutting prep!

Still thinking, Emma realised that all she had to do to take her revenge on her namesake, was to take as long as she dare in finding Carmen. As a result, Emma Fingleton would get her good, hard spanking in front of all the junior girls, not just one classmate. And over the ample, experienced knee of their prep mistress, not just over a mere beginner's lap, as Carmen's had been for her. And, with a bit of luck, not just a meagre dozen with the hand over her petticoated knickers! Emma sighed inwardly. If she were able to witness that whacking, and personally adminis-

ter Carmen's, her revenge would achieve perfection. Still, she mustn't grumble!

"Wait!"

Emma's blood turned to ice. Was Miss Cholmondeley even cleverer than she? What had she missed? Petrified, she turned back to face her housemistress.

"Return here with Carmen. As you'll be an Upper Sixth Former after next term without ever having been a mentor, you'd better get some experience in punishment. Before I cane Carmen, you will give her a skirts-up paddling over my writing desk."

Emma blushed prettily, and contrived to look worried, as if in sympathy for her fallen mentor. In fact she felt she was walking on air as she left the room. But there was more to come.

As she passed the outside of the junior prep room, her namesake was dolefully giving a mildly amused-looking Mrs. Wellesley the required message.

"You, new girl. Emma Vane-Perkins isn't it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Wellesley."

"Go to Miss Fenton's room. My compliments, and may I borrow her slipper. Tell her you will be returning it in about ten minutes when you will describe the use to which her slipper has been put."





*Miss Bethune's Rule*

by Miss Marianne Martindale



## *Preface to Miss Bethune's Rule*

**D**uring my nearly twenty years in Aristasia—the all-female country of our own creation—living in a world where I have both received and administered punishment and corporal chastisement, I have learnt and felt many things about the act of punishing. I have felt the feelings that Marcia feels, where one longs to be punished so much that one aches and I have felt too, Miss Bethune's feelings of wishing to impose cruel punishments. I think that I understand and know more about the true meanings of these feelings and how they can be pure and mystical than any inhabitant of the Pit (the hideous, inverted world created since the 1960s). Such feelings are not sexual in origin (though they can be perverted into being so without much difficulty, especially in the sex-sodden, animal atmosphere of the Pit), though they are indeed sensual.

A true sensuality can lead heavenwards; animal passions, whether of sex or sado-maschism, lead to hell, a rather repetitive, boring hell. Sexual immorality and sado-maschism are both manifestations of a dull, suburban spirit prompted into puppet-like acts of obedient rebellion by the propaganda of the television machine.

I have lived for twenty years an exciting and magical life;—a difficult life, for building an entire civilisation between a dozen souls out of the emptiness has not been easy, but it has been and is fundamentally satisfying and rewarding, and ever shall be.

Quite soon after I first became involved and before I decided to leave the Pit for ever and become a permanent resident of Aristasia I knew that I had found beliefs and ideals I was prepared to die for. I cannot tell you the relief I felt; that something meant so much that I could willingly die for it. It was the philosophical and spiritual background that meant so much to me; the ruthless analysis of all that I had found so abhorrent in the Pit; the depth of meaning and ways of understanding the universe that existed in the founder girls' teachings.

I did not join Aristasia because of discipline; I knew nothing about it. I had no thoughts or feelings either way on that subject. The revelation that discipline was a part of the way of life I was visiting and was attracted to came out of the blue; on the day someone decided

to punish me for something I had done wrong and I had to accept it or go running back to the Pit.

I joined, and other early girls joined, because of the spiritual and philosophical ideology of the founding members, because of the possibility of finding meaningfulness where before there had been an empty, gaping hole. This in the second decade of darkness (the 1970s). Now, in the closing years of the darkest, most heathen century the world has ever seen, more girls are attracted to visit Aristasia because of the existence of physical discipline than for any other reasons (and there are plenty of other possible reasons).

Such a change has come about in a few short years because of the increasing emptiness of people's lives, the sense of isolation and frustration, but perhaps more than anything because of a seeking after boundaries and restraints, a seeking of firm edges in a world that has none. The Pit is a world laden with chains; chains that bind you to your work, often soulless; chains of self-protection that keep you away from true connexions with others; chains which yet leave you with a sense of floating into the outer darkness and chaos. The Pit is a world of ugliness and insecurity, of a 'personal independence' that is merely slavery.

For me the most important thing about Aristasia, the thing that I most burn to communicate, is that being good is exciting. For perhaps hundreds of years being a good girl has seemed dull in comparison with the supposed excitement of being naughty. I remember being rather cross with Walt Disney because the Wicked Queen in Snow White is so much more compelling than Snow White herself. That evil is exciting and goodness is drab and feeble is an utterly false myth. Learning to be good takes effort and determination, imagination and courage; qualities which are sorely lacking in the Pit.

But those qualities are there, secretly there, in many girls in the Pit, who outwardly behave just like everyone else yet who secretly harbour yearnings and dreams which they never tell of.

I have written this story so that those girls who have feelings such as the ones described therein, whether it be the magical communication or the longing to thrash or be thrashed, will know that others in Aristasia feel them too, and that their inner feelings and desires will be met with comprehension and a sound beating.

## *Miss Bethune's Rule*

Marcia stood waiting outside her mother's door for the third time that week. It was one of the disadvantages of having a schoolmistress, a strict schoolmistress, for a mother. Really, Mummy was awful, why couldn't she leave school behind when she came home! Why every time she, Marcia, forgot to do the washing-up or slouched or spoke in an unladylike way, did she have to wait outside her mother's study and undergo the indignity of bending over and receiving a punishment. Why should she have to suffer when her friends got away with everything scot-free, no matter what they did? If only Mummy wasn't so old-fashioned! Suddenly a genteel, measured voice interrupted her thoughts with the familiar phrase:

"You may enter, Marcia". As she went in she noticed a small frown of displeasure on her mother's handsome face. Marcia heard with a shock of self-conscious exposure, her mother's voice saying primly:

"Moody again, Marcia? Really! Children were so much more accepting when I was young. We all had the sense to realise that corporal punishment was good for us, even if we didn't like it. There wasn't one of my old school friends who wasn't glad that she was treated strictly when she was young and most of us had mothers and aunties at home far stricter with them than I am with you, I'll have you know." Marcia's mother paused, a dreamy, musing look settling on her face as she reminisced on those long gone days.

"You ask Miss Bethune next time she's here. She'll tell you what it was like."

Marcia caught her breath. A sudden flame of interest at the thought of asking Miss Bethune about the punishments she had received as a child shot through her with a startling force. She pushed away the feeling.

"Oh. Mummy, I couldn't. I'd be far too embarrassed."

"I suppose you couldn't," sighed her mother, privately thinking to herself how much more interesting just grown-up girls

had been in her youth, and then she brushed the thought away, impatiently, guiltily. After all she was disparaging her own daughter. Oh well, down to business.

"This is the third time this week that I have had to call you to my study. If it happens again I shall have to take sterner measures. I'm getting seriously worried about your behaviour. What is it about you? You never behave like a young lady. You hold yourself in a clumsy way; your back is never straight. You never seem to display the charm of femininity."

Marcia's attention drifted. It was all so predictable, all so familiar. Now if Miss Bethune was sitting there. She was quite sure that Miss Bethune would have something to say that would make her sit up and pay attention. Her thoughts drifted back to the present just in time to hear her mother say:

"Bend over, Marcia. Six strokes of the strap, followed by six strokes of the cane."

"No," she added, as Marcia gasped at the size of the punishment. "I am determined that this sort of unfeminine, unladylike behaviour is going to stop. I'm going to make a charming feminine young lady out of you however long it takes."

Her mother moved behind her and lifted up her skirt. As she tucked Marcia's petticoat firmly between her legs so that the flimsy nylon was tight against her seat, she thought of all the girls she had seen bent over waiting for punishment during her long career. Corporal punishment was to her a matter-of-fact duty. She would not say she was exactly bored by it. There was after all, a sense of satisfaction in a job well done when the cane landed expertly and made raised, even stripes. But if it was not exactly boring, it was not exciting either. She could never understand those mistresses whose voices quivered slightly when they discussed among themselves the girls they disciplined and the methods they used. To her, punishment was just a part of caring for the soul, as necessary a part of spiritual nourishment as love was.

Oh, if only it wasn't so boring, thought Marcia, as she felt her mother smooth down her petticoat and tuck it between her legs. At least she isn't going to strap and cane me on the bare flesh of my thighs.

Marcia felt the first stroke of the strap land. It seemed to bit into her with a deep, thudding bite. Oh, the sting! Marcia wished that she was not due for five more strokes and then a caning on top. She *would* be sore by the end. She could tell by the severity of the strokes as the next one landed, and the next, that her mother was really annoyed with her, and she could only be thankful that her petticoat was not raised also.

The strapping ended and the ordeal of the cane was about to begin. Marcia didn't move a muscle. She was well-trained and always kept still, though sometimes she made a noise and even cried. She knew she would today. She was trying not to give in to the pain but she could tell that a moment would come, quite shortly, when a sob would break from her. She tried to postpone the moment, to see if she could outlast the strokes that fell. Sharp, stinging strokes of the crook-handled cane now that cut across her bottom and made her wince.

In her effort to keep her tears at bay, Marcia fell to dreaming that Miss Bethune stood behind her, her dark eyes flashing, her voice quivering with righteous anger, and her arm uplifted to give Marcia a sound whipping with the cane. Marcia felt a little tremulous and her heart beat faster. Really, she couldn't understand this new preoccupation with Miss Bethune. And then the next stroke fell, and Marcia caught her breath. Her sobs rose inside her, and broke forth as the last and final stroke of the cane landed with a resounding sting.

Later, when Marcia was lying on her bed reading, continually shifting from one hip to the other so as not to rest on her bottom, she heard the doorbell ring and her mother greet a visitor. It was Miss Bethune. She had come. Should she ask Miss Bethune about her childhood as her mother had suggested? No, she wouldn't have the nerve. Yet even as Marcia rejected the idea as too audacious she felt a sense of sadness, almost of loss. It would really be rather nice to sit alone with Miss Bethune, who was much younger than Mummie, and look into her lovely eyes which seemed so full of mystery and promise and hear her tell of distant happenings in a childhood long past.

Miss Bethune, sitting downstairs with Marcia's mother in a particularly matter-of-fact mood owing to the irritation she had fought hard to suppress when the bus had been late, would have been rather surprised to have overheard Marcia's thoughts about her eyes and their ability to flash. She herself had no sense of her own inner fire. Indeed, there had as yet been no evidence of it in her life. She was a spinster, comfortably off. "No need to demean myself by working as most young girls have to nowadays". Nothing horrible had ever happened to her, nor anything exciting either. A thought suddenly struck her as she reached for the tea that Marcia's mother was handing her and her hand shook, spilling the tea into the saucer.

"Oh, how clumsy of me. I'm so sorry," both ladies began to say at once.

As Marcia's mother left the room to get a clean cup, Miss Bethune sat back in her chair and examined the thought that had caused her so much surprise. She had suddenly realised that she had been cross at the bus being late because she liked to be in the house when Marcia was punished. She liked to hear the murmur of voices behind closed doors, and the occasional sound of a stroke of the cane or strap which drifted through. Miss Bethune blushed. Really, what were things coming to when an old woman like her was interested in a young woman's punishment.

Miss Bethune was doing herself an injustice. She was not in fact the "*much* younger" than her mother which Marcia thought her. Nor was she the old woman she had disparagingly called herself. She was six years younger than Marcia's mother though she did look at least ten years younger. Marcia's mother had been an awe-inspiring sixth former when Miss Bethune had first entered the girls' high school as a timid and delicate child. Alison Hunter, then Alison Salcombe, a capable but kind child, had been assigned to look after the newcomer, and this she had done most effectively, taking Cynthia Bethune through her first two years with an ever increasing tenderness and authoritativeness. Alison had practised on the younger girl her own increasing desire to rule young children with a mixture of kindness and severity, and as Cynthia grew in confidence as her mentor grew fonder of her, so



did she become the recipient of ever more numerous punishments. These were given in the annexe, a rather private place when all the other girls had gone home.

Alison, who was fast becoming aware of her own vocational aspirations as a schoolmistress and potential disciplinarian, would stand at the front of the class pretending that the timid Cynthia was a class full of excited, turbulent first years whom she would then proceed to call to order one by one levying any punishments she awarded for their various acts of minor rebellion and noisiness on the acquiescent child.

Cynthia had adored her and missed Alison dreadfully when she left school for Oxford. They had met occasionally in holidays in the years that followed, though Cynthia could tell that such meetings were really acts of kindness on the older girl's part, rather than a genuine inclination.

Cynthia had nursed a rather sore heart for several years but once she herself was at university things had improved and their friendship had been taken up again with a genuine affection. The punishments had ceased once Alison left school, a fact which had been a matter of relief for Cynthia at the time, though when they met regularly in later years she had always enjoyed hearing Alison's tales of how she dealt with carelessness, bad work or rebelliousness among the girls she taught.

Cynthia Bethune was dark-haired, with fine, regular features and large, liquid eyes which betrayed her sensitive nature. She did look younger than her years though she was not aware of the fact, having always been rather modest in her appraisal of herself. She had a presence of which she was quite unaware, thinking of herself as rather dull and ordinary and, in recent years, too easily roused to irritation. She was often irritable nowadays, she thought to herself sadly after the first shock of realisation that she had wanted to overhear Marcia's punishment had faded and she had pushed the treacherous thought into the background of her mind.

She was prevented by her own rather dowdy assessment of herself from realising the source of her tension. Deep inside she was full of fire and poetry, full of a desire to live, breathe and laugh in-

tensely, full of an urgency to feel the blood singing in her veins and the wind playing in her hair. In short, she was like an adolescent girl on the brink of womanhood, fidgety and anxious, waiting for love and passion to enter into her life and transform everyday reality into a magical, mysterious land.

And yet of this, she knew nothing. Only Marcia, shut away in her room and wishing fervently that she could persuade herself to go downstairs and ask to speak to Miss Bethune, was aware of it. Not fully aware, but beginning to be so, as the figure of Miss Bethune slowly changed in front of the girl's inner eyes from the fairly short, somewhat dowdy figure of her mother's friend to a tall and mysterious lady who stood wrapped in a dark cloak trimmed with fur and gestured dramatically to Marcia to kneel at her feet.

Marcia turned on her bed and lay on her back, wincing slightly as she changed position. But suddenly the discomfort was welcome to her. It seemed a fitting accompaniment to the fluttering birth of her new feelings. She could sense Miss Bethune standing over her, half-heard an order to stand up and bend over a chair. She felt in her dreamy, faraway state the sensation of airiness on her thighs as her skirt was lifted, and the soreness on her bottom being revived as she half-felt, half-heard the strokes of a switch descending. Her bottom smarted and stung, her heart was beating fast in an overwhelming feeling of longing. A tingling wave of deliciousness spread from her legs and up through her body. Oh how she longed for Miss Bethune to punish her; oh why did she long for it so? She lay still, suffused in the delight of her yearning for submission, without understanding what she felt. She lay still, a rather puzzled and apprehensive young woman of eighteen; lay quietly until the warmth of the summer afternoon mingled with her dreamy state and sent her to sleep.

Miss Bethune looked up at the ceiling. Where was the girl? She had usually joined them by now, her face a little puffy and red about the eyes if her punishment, as it had been today, had been rather severe. Miss Bethune had listened as usual to her friend's mock despair as she recounted Marcia's faults and her refusal to

respond to the corporal punishment that had served them so well in their early years.

"It was different then, dear," Miss Bethune found herself saying, almost as surprised as her friend to hear herself speak out instead of listening quietly in her usual manner as the more forceful woman spoke her mind. "Everyone about us was being punished, usually at home as well as at school. We all understood what corporal punishment was about, its place in the scheme of things, and most of us preferred the quick, sharp sting of physical punishment to a dreary hour of detention. We none of us imagined that a time would come when both detentions and corporal punishments were unlikely events in a schoolgirl's life. I admire you for sticking to your principles Alison, both while Marcia was at school and since she left, and doing what you know to be right in the face of opposition and non-comprehension but——" She hesitated as her friend snorted to show her contempt of the lax attitudes and almost non-existent standards of the present-day. "But," she continued firmly, gaining confidence as she spoke, "it is different for Marcia. She lives in a world where no-one around her is reprimanded, either at home or at school."

"My girls jolly well are," Mrs. Hunter muttered, determined to show her opposition to the general trends of modern-day life, even at the expense of interrupting Cynthia's flow.

"Yes, but no longer with corporal punishment, darling, even if you do keep up the time-honoured traditions of lines and detentions."

A pained shadow fell across Alison Hunter's face. She had nearly left her beloved profession when the relentless hand of liberalism had finally struck the death-blow to her regime in the private school at which she taught. She had had a ferocious row with the Head, who maintained that the parents would no longer stand for it. Alison knew, *knew*, from her many talks with parents, at least the parents of her girls, how wrong the headmistress was, and yet the Head was adamant, unmoved by any argument. At length Alison had had to give up the fight and yield the ground to the corrupting influences of modern liberal thought. It was a constant thorn in her side. She had nearly given up her post, but the

thought of sitting at home, bursting with vitality and enthusiasm, with no-one but her rather unenthusiastic daughter to communicate with had driven her to a rather desperate desire to stick it out. No, she had to continue teaching whatever the cost to her internal harmony. It was better than being without the girls altogether. But the decision had cost her dear, and was perhaps a factor in her unrelentingly strict treatment of her own daughter.

Miss Bethune continued. "Marcia lives in a world where none of her friends are punished—none of them. Have you ever considered, Alison, how much they probably tease her?" Miss Bethune's voice rose and cracked a little as a rush of understanding and compassion made tears spring to her eyes. She suddenly thought of Marcia differently, saw her almost as a heroine, facing the derisive comments. Children can be so cruel, thought Miss Bethune, of Marcia's contemporaries.

Her friend looked slightly shocked. "No, Cynthia. Now that you mention it, I haven't thought of it from Marcia's point of view." Her voice trailed off and softened slightly. She was almost talking to herself. "I've just been so determined not to give in. I've been thinking of myself really. Cynthia, have I been wrong? Have I been wrong in all these years?" Her voice rose in a sudden, uncharacteristic panic of self-doubt.

Miss Bethune crushed the panic with her matter-of-fact tone, as she replied soothingly, "Of course not, darling. Don't be silly. I wasn't trying to suggest anything of the kind." All at once she knew what she was going to say before she said it, and she felt suddenly sick, whether with fear or excitement she could not tell. She continued, "You say Marcia does not respond to your treatment. Why not let *me* try to take her in hand? Why not let me see if I can help her understand the value and necessity of our beliefs and methods?"

"*You! You!*" stammered her friend, in complete amazement. "You've never been a disciplinarian."

"No, darling, you're quite right. It was a silly idea. I withdraw it."

"No, wait!" Marcia's mother was suddenly alight with a flame of enthusiasm. "You may be right. It may be just the thing. It is

always easier to talk to auntie rather than mummie when one has just grown up. Yes, I agree. From now on Marcia shall report to you for correction, and we'll see what you make of her."

Mrs. Hunter rose to go out to the kitchen. "I shan't be long, Cynthia. Do read if you want to." She looked at her friend and thought with a pang of compassion that she seemed tired and suddenly frail. "Perhaps you should try and doze, darling. Your long wait for the bus must have tired you out."

Miss Bethune was tired. She sat rigidly in her chair, assailed by a profound sense of her own worthlessness, and a doubt of her ability to do as she had suggested, a doubt so strong as to almost make her doubt her sanity in that moment of claiming the jurisdiction of her friend's daughter. But then, a drowsiness settled upon her. She saw Marcia's face, as she had expected to see it during her visit, vulnerable and soft with weeping, and knew that she, Cynthia Bethune, wanted to make Marcia's eyes weep, wanted to strap her and strap her hard until the girl cried out. Miss Bethune stirred restlessly. What was she thinking of? Such a thought was cruel. She abhorred cruelty.

But another part of her was wiser, more ancient, more cognisant of the truth, and from the depths of her soul rose up a cry that told her that Marcia needed to be softened and purified, wanted to be softened and purified, was desperate to be softened and——Miss Bethune smiled. She was asleep, and neither her fears nor her hopes could worry her consciously till she awoke.

Marcia slept. Miss Bethune slept, and in their dreams they met. Such things are possible, likely even, when there is a strong magnetic pull between two sensitive souls. For Marcia was sensitive, and Miss Bethune recognised this, recognised it despite Alison's misinterpretation of her daughter's sensitivity as mere sullenness and rebellion, a misinterpretation that Cynthia Bethune had heard ever more frequently in recent years.

But for now they dream, and dream happily. No need to tell you the dream for you have heard it already. They dreamed, both of them, of Miss Bethune standing erect and splendid above the kneeling girl, and slowly, lovingly almost, preparing her over the chair for a long and hard switching. Miss Bethune lifted Marcia's

skirt and ran her hand over the young woman's bottom. Marcia felt the air caressing her thighs, and Miss Bethune's hand, cool and long-fingered, pass once over her bottom. Her whole body woke with a flame of desire, her whole being ached and ached for the purifying sting of Miss Bethune's switch. Miss Bethune stood both behind her and in front of her with the strange, distorted geography of dreams. She stood behind Marcia, tapping her lightly on her seat in preparation for the strokes, and in front of her, upright and erect, flexing the switch and smiling alluringly into Marcia's eyes and flushed, eager face. The first stroke fell, and each dissolved into ecstasy. More strokes fell, firm and biting. The feeling of wielding the switch, of holding such intimate, searing power in her hands excited Miss Bethune, and as she thrilled to her task, laying each stroke on the vulnerable girl with determination and zest, so did Marcia offer herself willingly, and ever more willingly, her very soul crying out for the sweet, sharp pain that seared across her dream.

And as Marcia's cries rose into the dream landscape, Miss Bethune smiled, a heavenly smile of beauty and compassion, and Marcia cried, cried with joy that she felt such heavenly pain, such an ecstasy of submission, such a peace and acceptance and rightness. And both of them knew that they met the other in reality, if such a dream meeting deserves so prosaic a name. Both of them knew that the intensity, the magic, the drama that had been missing from their rather ordinary and dull lives, had suddenly and unexpectedly woken to life, and the Gates of Heaven would open wide and bid them enter in.

"Cynthia, I've brought you some tea. Wake up, dear." Mrs. Hunter bent over her friend and shook her upper arm slightly. "Come along, darling. Do wake up. I'll tell you why," she said, her voice becoming brisker and more authoritative, "I think it's a good idea for you to see Marcia now. No, I know she's had a firm punishment already today, but it won't do her any harm to have more. And there's another point to bear in mind. You've never given a punishment before and it is something that takes a bit of training. You might think that it seems quite simple, but I assure you that that is not the case. You have to know what you're

doing. When you're starting out, you have to feel confident to strike firmly, otherwise you can just tap the implement against the bottom for fear of hurting the recipient. You have to bring into yourself a determination to do your duty, and do it well, and remember that of course it should hurt, it must hurt. I'll give you some lessons soon, Cynthia. Ha, ha—" Alison laughed, a small, nervous laugh. "And I think I'll have to let you practise giving me corporal punishment. Of course, it's an awfully long time since I've had any punishment, but it's the only really effective way to learn; the giving of punishments to another who can discuss their effectiveness, and I don't suppose it will do me any harm either." She paused, and when Miss Bethune made as if to speak, she continued hurriedly, "One last point, darling, your lack of expertise won't matter today. Marcia will start out sore and that will be an advantage. She'll feel every stroke, no matter how inexpertly it lands."

Miss Bethune had felt many things while Alison was talking; a sense of elation, and then fear at the thought of seeing Marcia that day; insecurity at being such a complete novice, and a strange, unexpected exaltation at the thought of Alison who had, though many years ago, given her so many, many punishments being bent over in front of her, waiting to receive six strokes of the cane.

She had smiled a little to herself while her friend was still speaking. It was odd what unexpected depths and unknown feelings one could discover in oneself in middle years. At her friend's last words, "Marcia will be sore. She'll feel every stroke," Miss Bethune felt a soft and tender, yet almost unbearable yearning. The thought of every stroke hurting Marcia terribly because of her soreness ran through her soul like sweet tongues of fire. Her fingers felt hot and itchy and she could almost see a switch jump into her hands and lie there quivering, alert, awaiting her command. In her mind's eye she saw Marcia's bottom raised in the air, saw how submissively she bent over before her. Oh, but she was dreaming again. Why should it be like that? She felt a cold hand grip her heart. It wouldn't be like that. Marcia would be hard, resistant probably. She accepted it from her mother, yes, but from her, Cynthia, her mother's friend, why, why should she? She,

Cynthia, would not know how to assert her authority. Authority! She had no authority. What would a young grown-up girl think of her mother handing her over to another woman to be punished. I'm sure she'll think one person punishing her is enough.

Miss Bethune felt a cold, damp moisture break out on her forehead. She felt as though she were in the grip of a typhoon or a whirlpool. Her emotions seemed to cascade around her and break over her in bewildering floods. Happiness, fear, power and insecurity. She felt like an adolescent at her first dance with all the doubtful uncertainty of prospective rejection and joyful anticipation that she might be the belle of the ball. Of course, life never seemed to be quite either. Neither exhilarating nor intensely painful. At least it had not been for her. And the girl who had stood in the sweet party-frock with its full circular skirt and a small bunch of flowers grasped tightly in one hand, as she waited for invitations to dance from the boys the other girls admired—she, herself, had never been very interested in boys, but to be chosen above all others was what one at least hoped for—but who had received invitations only from the least dashing, that intense child had gone underground in her, and she had felt that her intensity must be a fraud and a hollow sham, for there were none who matched her in it, none who saw the beautiful princess that in her secret heart she felt herself to be. So she had relinquished the struggle and agreed that life must be boring, and grey, and dull, and that she had been mistaken to think that it was a grand adventure in which one sailed out on a galleon with the sails fully rigged and one's heart singing with freedom and joy. She had come to agree reluctantly with fate that it must only be like that in fairy-tales and stories of magical lands and doings read about as a child. And so she who felt everything with a passionate intensity that was half-paradise, half-torture, had gone underground in Miss Bethune's soul and remained there hidden and unbidden to the surface of her mind for many years. But now she was called. Now she would have a place at last.

Miss Bethune did not understand what was happening to her. She did not know whether to be disturbed or delighted that she was feeling joyful heights of excitement and terrifying peaks of



nervous self-doubt. Really, she must compose herself. This would never do.

Alison's competent, firm voice broke in on her thoughts. "Well, there's no time like the present. I'll call Marcia downstairs."

"No! Wait!" A sudden surge of wanting to take the responsibility, wanting to shape the coming events to her own mould took command of Miss Bethune. She sat upright in her chair, eyes alert and shining, her voice also firm and clear. "I'll take charge from here. I want to do everything my way."

Alison laughed. "Oh, so you have a way of your own, have you, darling?" Her voice, the voice of the experienced schoolmistress unused to meeting with any resistance to her will from anyone, least of all from an inexperienced friend whom she had dominated all their lives together, was slightly mocking, with, perhaps, just a tinge of resentment.

"Yes, I have, Alison," her friend replied firmly. "Of course, I'm not sure what that way is yet, but I feel it will be different from your way, expert though that is." Alison looked as though she did not quite appreciate the commendation. "*Far* more expert, of course, with much more successful experience than I can ever hope to catch up with." She paused, pleased to see by the look on Alison's face that she was mollified. Miss Bethune continued. "Anyway, I don't really know what I'm talking about. I haven't the slightest idea how to proceed." But as she said the words she knew they were not true. She did know. She knew *something* anyway. She knew that intensity and excitement and a sense of magical adventure were imperative, knew suddenly with a sharp, exciting stab of certainty that if only she could create a heightened sense of reality for both of them, that Marcia would, as it were, fall into her arms in thankfulness. She heard her own voice speak again.

"But I must just take the plunge and see what happens. If I'm guided into it by you, my dear, darling, overwhelmingly competent friend, I shall lose my nerve."

Alison nodded in sudden understanding. She was not emotional nor imaginative. She sailed through life at full steam, some-

what bluff and hearty, always enthusiastic, always vitally alive, but never sensitively so. Miss Bethune sighed quietly to herself. It had not always been so. Alison had had plenty of imagination as she stood before the small and shy Cynthia in the annexe classroom and made her bend over a desk time and time again as she acted out all her unrulier classmates. No, she was not imaginative now, but she was sympathetic, and warm. And Alison herself, she had suddenly remembered as though through a dark cloud the sensation of standing in front of her first real class of girls and calling someone out to the front. That awful agonising moment as the girl prepares to leave her seat and you wait with your hand on the strap and your mouth dry. Whatever will you do if she refuses to obey? Of course no girl ever had. She had had right from the beginning as a schoolmistress, the natural, forceful authority that had impressed itself upon little Cynthia and the form Alison had had charge of when she was a prefect. No one had ever disobeyed her then; and no-one would now. She came back with a rush to the present. No, Cynthia was right. She must find her own feet. After all, it had been Cynthia's idea. She must not take it over. She waved her hand cheerfully towards her friend.

"On you go, darling, she's all yours. I'll be as quiet as a mouse except for our training sessions. I promise." Miss Bethune knew with a sense of thankfulness that Alison meant what she said and had in that moment truly relinquished her authority. She would leave Marcia to her—entirely to her.

Miss Bethune sat back again in her chair, a small, involuntary prayer of thanks unspoken on her lips. Perhaps she would begin living at last. She smiled at the thought. Whatever did she mean?

Marcia awoke to a knock on her bedroom door. "May I come in, Marcia dear," she heard Miss Bethune's voice calling. Marcia sat up on the bed with dishevelled hair, a beating heart and a sense of panic. Why could she hear Miss Bethune's voice from outside the door? Surely she was already there. Had they not just been together, and —— Marcia blushed a little. She remembered she had been dreaming, felt again the echo of her submissive desires. Miss Bethune *here*? Whatever could she want?

"Come in," she called, with a slight quaver in her voice that she hoped would not be noticeable from the other side of the door. Curiosity consumed her as to why Miss Bethune had come, and if it were anything to do with her own strange thoughts and fantasies. She half-hoped, half-feared it was. She wanted it to be true and yet — She felt as though she were standing on a threshold. Her heart was calling out to her, let her be claiming me, let her take me and do with me as she wills. She could not hear the words, the inner truth of her soul was still not clear to her in a waking state. She only knew that she felt uncomfortably intense and excited, and that looming close at hand was a fear, a fear that Miss Bethune would say "Some tea for you?" or some other mundane thing that would break the spell of the dream which still clung about her like the whiff of woodsmoke hanging in the air on an autumn's day.

Marcia saw the door handle turning and Miss Bethune pushed open the door and entered the room. "Marcia, sit up!" Miss Bethune's voice rang out, clear and loud, sharp and authoritative. Even though Marcia was half-expecting her to speak in such a way she got a shock. Something in her stirred sluggishly and contemplated rebellion, but she who had been beaten in the dream landscape sat up to attention before the more everyday part of her had any say in the matter.

"Look at you, girl. Your hair is all out of place, the top buttons of your blouse are all undone and your skirt is all crumpled. You should take it off when you can tell you're getting sleepy. Take it off now and place it neatly on the end of the bed." Miss Bethune paused while Marcia obeyed her and then stood to attention in her petticoat, Marcia wondering all the while why the same words in her mother's mouth would have seemed nagging, and in Miss Bethune's sounded commanding and caressing at the same time.

"Now fetch me that hairbrush from your dressing-table." Marcia turned to fetch it and then handed it mutely to Miss Bethune. An air of surprise hung in the room. Both Miss Bethune's normal self and Marcia's everyday self were watching, almost scandalised by the unorthodox behaviour. But Miss

Bethune's true self and Marcia's inner self were absorbed in the drama of the moment. Nothing could disturb them.

Miss Bethune sat down slowly on the sole bedroom chair as though upon an ancient throne and her dark hair and her dark eyes seemed to glow with a passionate intensity. She seemed immense. She towered above Marcia, even though she herself was standing, waiting in apparent quietness to be told what to do. She was not quiet inside. Her heart was hammering afresh, her legs were weak beneath her, she felt giddy.

"Kneel down, child." Marcia knelt, or rather, sank down, her legs almost giving way beneath her. Miss Bethune continued. "Repeat after me, 'I pray you, mistress, please beat me for my misdemeanor.' Is that clear?" Marcia nodded. "Yes, *ma'am*," Miss Bethune's voice sharply cautioned.

"Yes, *ma'am*," murmured Marcia, and then a little louder, "I pray you, mistress, please beat me for my misdemeanor." Her voice faltered and faded as she reached the end of the sentence. She was not reluctant. She hoped Miss Bethune would not think her so. No, she was not reluctant, but she was overwhelmed. Her voice was husky with the intensity of her desire to submit to the magnificent creature before her, resplendent with a powerful femininity that Marcia had never seen before, but had felt ought to exist somewhere. She wanted to fling her arms round Miss Bethune's ankles, or bow her head until her forehead touched the ground, and swear eternal fidelity. But she did not dare to move or speak until told. She remained kneeling, apparently impassive, her inner world a dazzling, delightful kaleidoscope of passions.

"Come over my lap, Marcia," said Miss Bethune, her voice firm and crisp. She was not acting or playing a part. Now that the moment had arrived, this unexpected, unplanned moment—for she had had no intention of punishing Marcia in the bedroom and had only come to take her downstairs and explain things to her—she felt quite calm and authoritative. She felt as though everything had been taken out of her hands; all she had to do was follow the prompting, the script almost, that was rising up in her unbidden and seemed to know exactly what to do. No, she had had no premonition that such a spanking would ensue as she had

knocked on the door. To declare such a punishment had merely been an immediate response to the untidy, dishevelled sight that met her eyes. Marcia's slovenly appearance had offended her sense of orderliness and neatness. She liked everything to be kept in its place, and though she felt that such a preoccupation was a little out of key with the power that surged now through her veins, she could tell that this longing for tidiness was a close relation of something far deeper, far older that flowed like an unspoken knowledge in her veins. Words emerged from the back of her mind and blazoned themselves on a wall hung with dark curtains as she heard them spoken in her inner ear, resonant and wise.

"Harmony is the key of life, and innocence the key of harmony. She who is in harmony shall be marked by gentleness, by meekness of spirit, and by the pure light of abundant joy shining forth from the inmost recesses of her being." This was what she wanted for Marcia. This was what she hoped for. The words continued. "Harmonic life is danced within the music of eternity, and the pattern of the dance is wholeness. But without control shall the dance be destroyed, without discipline is the rhythm shattered in a host of discordant fragments."

All at once Marcia was over her lap. She felt the weight of the young woman pressing down onto her, as Marcia adjusted her body to fit Miss Bethune's lap. Miss Bethune shifted her thighs slightly on the chair and pulled Marcia more firmly onto her lap. She liked the feeling of warm, soft femininity placed so vulnerably over her thighs. She lifted the girl's white petticoat and felt her shudder as the cool air met and mingled with her feeling of exposure. She raised the hairbrush and brought it down on the convenient band of flesh between her stocking tops and her silky nylon knickers, which carried a few reddened weals of strokes gone astray from her mother's beating.

The first stroke surprised Miss Bethune. She had meant to bring the brush down firmly, but instead it landed softly, almost caressingly. A strange feeling seemed to grip her wrist and hold her back from the harder blows she had intended, and as the hairbrush smacked down in a rhythmic pattern, she felt a concentra-

tion more intense than any she had yet known, and the rhythm of the strokes seemed to come from deep, deep inside her and have a meaning which was lost to her conscious self. The strokes fell softly at first; *pat, pat-pat, pat, pat, pat*. And then with some slightly harder; *pat, pat, pat-pat; pat, pat, pat-pat*. Miss Bethune felt Marcia relax beneath the strokes, felt a trustfulness emerge beneath the rhythmic motion. Marcia's breathing was gentle and even, like a child asleep. Suddenly, when she judged the moment was right, when she felt Marcia's body relaxed and heavy and suppliant over her lap, Miss Bethune brought the brush down with a heavy, resonant smack. Marcia jumped a little and then lay perfectly still. Indeed, having abandoned herself to the smack, smack of the hairbrush when it had been but playing with her, she now opened herself to the strong blows that rained down upon her thighs. Marcia felt as though she were riding a horse bare-back, or was it she being ridden? She was not sure. All her awareness was concentrated in the narrow band of pain, in the bright, licking flames that sparkled and danced across her thighs. She felt the heat rise in her skin, and blushed to think how she must look to Miss Bethune's eyes as they bent over their task. Miss Bethune's rhythm slowed for a moment as she adjusted her grip, and a little moan escaped from Marcia's lips. Gracious, she wanted more. More and more and more. She wanted it never to stop, hard though it was. She could not help it; she loved the feeling of abandonment. She was Miss Bethune's slave for ever, and Marcia found herself wishing that she could declare herself, and have Miss Bethune take her face in her hands, look earnestly into the girl's eyes with her own dark and mysterious ones and say, "Yes, thee do I take for ever to have and to hold, to own and to beat till death us do part."

All at once the beating was over. Miss Bethune was running her long, cool fingers caressingly over the girl's thighs, soothing the heat, giving solace to the pain. Miss Bethune gave a little smack to the girl's bottom. Marcia winced, even a small smack hurt her, hurt her where the strap and the cane had already played their painful tune. And yet — and yet — and yet, she longed for more. Longed for Miss Bethune to be consumed with the de-

sire to own her, to be ravaged with the desire to beat her, and as she thought this her breath came fast and loud with a slight pant, and Miss Bethune's hands soothed her redness all the more, as though she understood and would indeed play her part.

Miss Bethune did understand. She found she could tell as near as anything what the girl was feeling, could feel her longings rise up and enter Miss Bethune's own soul to be met with a glad recognition. But of this she would say nothing. No, she was content with the first punishment. Plain and ordinary though it was, just a homely smack with a plain instrument, it had been all that Miss Bethune had hoped for. It had been marvellously, wonderfully intense. She had felt the two of them united in the rhythm, the one in giving, the other in suffering pain. It had been a dance. It had been a—yes, it had been a purification.

She pulled down the petticoat to cover Marcia's thighs and told her to stand. Marcia stood before her, her eyes downcast and Miss Bethune saw with a thrill that Marcia was feeling shy and modest, that she was vulnerable in a way that was unfamiliar to her. Miss Bethune laid her hand in a friendly gesture on Marcia's head, and then amended the gesture to smooth down her hair.

"Come, my girl. Off with that crumpled blouse." Marcia unbuttoned her blouse and slid it off and laid it carefully on the bed, with her skirt. She stood still and silent, looking demure in her pure, white, full-length petticoat, unmoving, waiting to be told what to do next. She loved the feeling of stillness. She felt so quiet, so peaceful. She had no will, nor desired any. There was only Miss Bethune in the world; Miss Bethune and her desires, her will. All the tumult of feelings of her so-recent adulthood were at peace in her. Her whole existence was concentrated on the being that was outside her, who had, whether she knew it or not, made an immediate, a loving slave of Marcia. Though she was still, every nerve in Marcia's body was tingling. Not in a tense or agitated way, but tingling as though a thousand fairies danced over her skin, and touched her everywhere at once with tiny, sparkling wands. She had never felt so peaceful, she had never felt so alive. The very air in the room seemed to vibrate with some mysterious power and intensity.

Miss Bethune stood up and moved to Marcia's wardrobe. She rummaged among the dresses on their hangers. Finally, she picked out a simple, plain blue dress with short sleeves, a white collar and cuffs and a full, almost fiftiesish skirt.

"Here, my dear. Put this on." The dress was a cast-off from a year or so before. Marcia looked at it, expecting to feel the sort of resistance that a young woman feels at being asked to don discarded and rather childish clothes, and found instead that she was eyeing it with approval. Yes, she could see a charm in it that she had not noticed before. The dress hung on its hanger, suspended from Miss Bethune's fingers. Oh, those fingers. Perhaps one day soon she would feel again those self-same fingers playing over her thighs, skin touching skin in a delicious smack. The dress shone and danced before her eyes, almost as though it had an inner light of its own.

Miss Bethune took the dress from its hanger and handed it wordlessly to Marcia. She turned her back as Marcia pulled on the dress and pulled open the drawer of Marcia's dressing table.

"Where do you keep your socks, child?" Marcia blushed. She felt vulnerable at the thought of wearing socks when she had been wearing stockings for so long.

"Here, ma'am," she said politely, moving towards the dressing table and indicating the lowest drawer. She hoped she was right. She did not think Miss Bethune would like a hitch in the smooth performance she was laying before them. No, it was all right. There were several pairs there; long ones for winter walks and Christmas Eve to be filled with Santa's little presents, short white ones for tennis. One of the short, white pairs was selected by Miss Bethune.

"Put these on now, dear." Marcia took the socks from Miss Bethune's outstretched hands and laying them down on the bed, turned her back demurely and began unclipping her stockings from the suspenders. She took them off and then sat down to put on the socks, blushing as she did so, to be putting on such childish clothes and to have heard herself called "dear". Miss Bethune handed her a pair of white cotton knickers and then pointed to some open-toed sandals that she could see in the bottom of the



wardrobe. Marcia took both items from her and stood up to slip off her knickers. As she replaced the scanty nylon knickers with the sensible white cotton ones, slipping them on demurely under her petticoat, she began to feel a change steal over her. With each change, each added item of attire, she felt herself grow younger, littler, until she felt as though she were but thirteen years old. But she liked it! Strange though it seemed to the corner of her conscious mind that still looked on alert and a little critical, she liked it. She felt fresh and clean. She felt pretty and unspoilt. Without quite knowing why she did so, she dropped a little curtsey in Miss Bethune's direction, and was rewarded both by a soft, feminine inner feeling of yielding and by a radiant smile that shone like a sudden beam of sunlight in Miss Bethune's oval face.

The smile was replaced almost instantaneously with a frown. "I thought you had sensed, child, that you were to do nothing, *nothing*, unless I say so, unless I order you to do something, or give you permission to do something. You disappoint me. Even gestures of submission may not be made without the express permission of the superior. Four strokes of the lash."

Marcia felt as though she were dying. Her world tumbled about her. She had disappointed her wondrous, magnificent Miss Bethune, so different from the mousey woman who sat downstairs week after week with her mother. Then she heard her sentence; four strokes of the lash, and her spirits revived. She was not to be abandoned then. Not to be cast back into the dreariness of everyday life. She would be beaten, and in the beating would be a chance of recompense, a balancing of her wilful act.

"Come, child. Follow me." Miss Bethune opened the bedroom door and went out onto the landing. Marcia followed her. She had a strange sensation about her throat, almost as though she were wearing a collar and Miss Bethune was holding a leash and pulling her gently forwards. The sensation faded and Marcia found herself descending the stairs with a careful tread, eyes downcast and a straight back. At the drawing room door, Miss Bethune stood to one side so that Marcia might step forward and open the door. Miss Bethune went in, into the room she had prepared for the punishment before going up to Marcia.

As Marcia entered after waiting quietly for Miss Bethune to pass before her, she saw that the curtains were drawn and a soft darkness lay upon the room. As her eyes grew used to the dimness, Marcia noticed that the drawing room furniture was pushed to the edges of the room, so that the chair that was standing in the middle of the room awaiting Marcia stood stark against the cleared floor. A shiver ran down her spine. There was something familiar about the chair, standing out stark against an indistinct landscape. But now she had no more time for thought. Miss Bethune was speaking to her.

"Step forward, child. Feet neatly together. Legs straight. Hands at your hem. Lift your skirt and petticoat. Bend over the chair."

Marcia did as she was told, each little action sending her deeper and deeper into a dream-like state. She was bent over now, still holding up her skirt and revealing to Miss Bethune's eyes the whiteness of her knickers echoed by the whiteness of the ankle socks glowing in the dim light, and the faint blur of the white petticoat that outlined the young woman's bottom.

"Hands on the seat of the chair. Now prepare yourself, Marcia. This is going to hurt. It is going to hurt you very much. And I want you to know that I'm going to enjoy punishing you, Marcia. I'm going to enjoy it very much."

Marcia felt a flame of ecstasy shoot up her legs from her feet, through her body and into her head. Her breath came fast and jerkily. Oh yes, oh yes, please, she thought inwardly, not an iota of her everyday self left to criticise or wonder. She felt as though she had been transported to Heaven. Miss Bethune wanted to punish her as much as she herself wanted to be punished. She almost wished she could die then and there, so intense was her delight, so fulfilled did she feel to know that she was wanted as she wanted, that she was to be beaten as she longed to be beaten.

Miss Bethune fetched the long, creamy-coloured switch that she had placed in readiness on a table at the side of the room.

"I am going to beat you in a moment, Marcia. I am going to give you four hard strokes. Just four. And because you want to please me, because you want to be beaten by me, when I have completed my four hard strokes you will want more. You may

not say anything, but you will want more with all your heart, and I shall feel you wanting them, and if I am pleased with you, I may give you more. But whether I chose to punish you with more strokes, or whether I leave you be, you are to acquiesce in my will. You must want only what I want. Is that clear?"

A muted "Yes, ma'am" came from the bent-over figure. Miss Bethune ran her hands up and down the girl's thighs. She liked the sensation of young, firm flesh beneath her fingers, flesh that had never known the touch of another, just as her own had never been touched, as virgin and pure as she herself was virgin and pure. There was no lust in her fingers, no improper emotions. She was directed still, and only, by the strange forces that guided her, and made her know what it was right and proper to do. She found that she felt compelled to do things that would never have occurred to her in her everyday consciousness, such as now, running her hands up and down Marcia's milk-white thighs. And yet everything she had done, and now did, had felt right and proper and in harmony. Yes, that was it. That was the word which fitted the feeling, the strange, evocative word that had flitted through her mind from Heaven knows where and spoken of harmony, harmony and—what was it now? She strained to remember, seeming to hear a faint chanting in her ears once more. Yes, a dance. A dance that needs, as all dances do, control and discipline.

She felt a sudden emptiness, and knew that it was the emptiness of leading a meaningless life in a meaningless world with trivial, dull things surrounding her. The emptiness passed as suddenly as it had come. This was richness. This was fullness, this odd, magical feeling of being bound to another, responsible for the other's every breath, every movement, bound to another soul in deep and passionate intensity.

Miss Bethune raised the switch. She held it high in the air and slashed it downwards. She had no doubt, no fear at all. She knew the stroke would be accurate, and it was. A blinding flash of pain seared Marcia's bottom, and yet she did not wince. She felt the stroke bite into her like a red-hot brand, and yet because she welcomed it—could she say it hurt? Yes, and no. It hurt and it did not hurt. It entered into her, deep inside her very soul, and she

felt the stroke land against something in the inner core of her being as though there were a tree or a pole which was symbolically the centre of her soul. She felt the pole shudder with the impact, shake, and then adjust itself as a dark cloud of poison, or sorrow, or heaviness—she could not tell which—left her centre with a sudden, freeing feeling.

The second stroke landed, just the same as the first. A deep pain which inflamed and hurt, but did not hurt. A force which shook her centre and left it clearer, cleaner. She watched with an inward sight, as the third and fourth strokes landed on the trunk, and shook a little more darkness from the leaves, each stroke in exactly the same place, each biting hard into the flesh.

It was over. The four strokes had been delivered. The four strokes had been received. Miss Bethune lifted the hem of the young woman's knickers demurely and examined the marks she had made on the already swollen flesh. She put some cool cream onto her fingers and rubbed the girl's flesh gently, soothingly. She replaced first the girl's petticoat, and then her skirt, smoothing them down absent-mindedly. She was peaceful. She was quiet and finished. There was to be no more. It was over. The punishment had been a ritual. She had not known it before she started, but she had felt it to be so as she proceeded. A ritual of purification. Purification for what end, or for what purpose she could not tell. But she would know when the time was right. She would feel the movement within her, the promptings that would direct her motions. Miss Bethune held Marcia by the shoulder and pulled her gently upward. She came up with the pressure, her eyes glinting with unshed tears, tears not of pain, but of a quiet gratitude. She too felt the resolution at the end of the punishment. She too had not wanted there to be any more strokes after all. She felt happy. She liked the way this mysterious thing moved, that you could take nothing for granted, not even the yearning for punishment, once that yearning had come upon you.

Yet as Miss Bethune turned Marcia towards her and placed her soft, cool lips upon the young woman's forehead in a gesture of affection, and a sealing of the bond between them, her soul flowered again in longing, and she placed her soul in Miss

Bethune's hands, and hoped and prayed that she might be taken in punishment again soon; taken into the dim, mysterious world that held so much more of promise than the world outside that magic room.

For days after her first real beating Marcia walked around in a dream. It was a very private dream. To all outward appearances she was inhabiting the same world as her family and friends about her. She answered in a normal tone, rather than a dreamy, far-away voice, when anyone spoke to her, though the voice which brought her from her private inner vision of being beaten over Miss Bethune's lap or strapped harshly while she lay supine on a bed was often a voice which commented, though without any real anxiety, "I say, Marcia, is anything wrong? You seem quieter than usual somehow," and on receiving the reassuring reply from a suddenly alert and chirpy Marcia that she was quite happy, the voice would relapse into soothed silence.

To be smacked hard over Miss Bethune's lap! To be laid over the knees, and her skirt lifted, her petticoat raised, to feel the hard, firm relentless strokes of an unforgiving palm over the tight whiteness of her knickers! To be tied to a bed, first one wrist and then the other, to feel her ankles gripped and the rope wind itself round each limb in turn and tighten sharply, roughly cutting into her skin, and then to be whipped, each stroke falling in a perfect, harmonious rhythm of cruelty! Each time such a thought passed across the window of her mind, Marcia dissolved, melted into a profound and deep wave of longing. The inner peacefulness, the rhythmic sounds, the complete, utter acceptance of the pain, the pain which hurt and yet didn't hurt, the pain that passed right through her and up and out of her shoulders, forcing her with each cleansing stroke to sink deeper into the bed or settle more fully into the lap;—all her feelings were raised, intensified, became realer to her than the bed she lay on or the street she walked on.

She didn't want the beatings to be soft, or kind, or loving. No, that could come later, after the fierce, cleansing pain—oh God! it hurt, she knew it hurt, why did she yearn for it so?—had burnt

through her, and left her peaceful, trembling, tender, both inwardly in her soft and yielded thoughts and in her sore, beaten bottom, curled up on a warm lap encircled by loving, motherly arms.

For days it continued; an everyday life which seemed real only when she was free to be with her thoughts; an outer life where she aped the daily round and fooled them all that she was there with them, even though a little quieter than before. Her elders put any slight unusualness in her behaviour down to a 'phase', and thought no more about it.

But one morning she woke, woke with a sudden jerk that sat her upright in the bed, precipitated into a dark, blank terror, into a sharp, biting pain of loss. Miss Bethune, where was she? She hadn't been back. She hadn't telephoned, written, called round, nothing; all was blankness. Marcia's dreams and fancies shattered into a million scattered pieces and lay in chaotic heaps on the bed-pane. She had been initiated, touched with fire and lit, like the blue paper on a rocket on Fireworks night, and she had burnt freely, without even the customary smouldering of paper before the sparks came, and soared magnificently upwards—but the night sky was empty. There were no answering sparks to greet her. She was bereft, alone, deserted.

Miss Bethune had been busy. Her thoughts were busy too; practical thoughts, scheming thoughts, fevered thoughts. She wished Marcia nothing but good. She wanted only the best for her. She wanted to serve her, by ruling her, by answering the call which she felt daily from Marcia's soul, calling, begging, yearning; *beat me, beat me, beat me*. She even, one startled evening when she sat up late thinking hard, heard out of nowhere Marcia's voice speaking clearly in her ears; heard Marcia pleading to be thrashed. "Thrash me, thrash me hard, thrash me harder, Miss Bethune, please, please, please".

What a wonderful sound the word "thrashed" has, Miss Bethune thought, shocked by hearing so clear a sentence and responding in thought as though someone had spoken in the room. How aptly it rolls off the tongue. How like it sounds to what it means. And before she knew she was about to do it, she heard her

own voice thinking the reply, in hard, icy tones;—"Do not worry, my child, I shall thrash you, thrash you far harder than you shall want, or deserve". She felt an answering shiver of excited fear run through her own body, a fear which yet seemed faint and shadowy, heard a soft, sweet sigh, almost felt the outbreath on her own cheek, sensed a swift uncoiling of tension and a warm, settled, snuggling feeling—all this, too, shadowy, faint, an echo.

In the next moment she understood. Marcia was asleep. She, Miss Bethune, was awake. She had heard Marcia, felt Marcia, almost *was* Marcia. She had never felt so finely attuned to another soul before, never lived in such deep and intimate communication. She couldn't lose it, she couldn't. All, all of it so precious. The actual beatings; the heaven of feeling such power; the ecstasy of knowing the girl longed for more beatings; the fact of her own hand being raised in harsh chastisement; the intimacy of being so close that one could feel Marcia's feelings when parted physically—all these experiences were like bright, red drops of enriching blood falling steadily into a life that now seemed grey and flat and dull in the extreme.

She had to keep what she had found, she had to. But how? She knew that she was utterly trustworthy. She knew that the passion aroused between them, the girl and the older woman, was pure and chaste and mystical. But who could she tell? How could she explain it? In a world so mad that it thought a quick smack from a parent to her own child was an assault, how could she stand up and say not only do I, your best friend, want to beat your daughter, but I want to beat her cruelly, and she wants it too. Of course it was true that Mrs. Hunter was strict herself, she refused to bow down to the nonsense of the modern world, she would trust the purity (at least so Miss Bethune reassured herself, at least there was a chance that Alison would understand that much) but how could she possibly understand the sweet, melting submission of the cruelty she and Marcia both yearned for? (Miss Bethune was thinking, you must understand, of the extremities of the case. She thought sometimes, and she could sense that Marcia thought also, of warm, motherly smacks, of short, firm, schoolmistressy strappings, of beatings that Marcia's own strict mother would ac-

cept and probably approve of). But the harshness, the coldness which though harsh, yes, cold, yes, was somehow warm and loving and giving—how could she explain that, even to Alison, even to herself. Her friend was after all a good solid schoolmistress. Mrs. Hunter understood ordinary punishments;—but these, these apparent monstrosities, how could she explain such feelings. The cruelty was obvious. The marks of such chastisement would show for days.

She was flooded with an icy fear. Monstrosities! Her feelings were monstrosities! Of course they were. What could she have been thinking of? A cold, cold hand crept over the beating warmth of her heart and squeezed it tightly till nothing but a small, sharp icicle inhabited her breast. I must be mad, I must be mad, she thought, aghast at the thoughts of the last few days. A panoramic vision scurried before her eyes; she saw a dark, evil version of herself, her lips twisted with cruelty and vicious enjoyment, beating and beating and beating a writhing, sobbing, naked girl; she saw the same girl crawling towards her and away from her on her hands and knees in response to imperious summons and haughty dismissals; she saw her chained to a dungeon wall, helpless and beaten, beaten and beaten again till the stripes showed livid on her flesh; each vision accompanied by the sounds of souls wailing in torment, pleading for relief. "Stop! stop! stop!" she shouted aloud. "I love her. I love her. I'm not cruel, I'm not!"

A lightning flash, vivid and blood-red, tore across her mind and obliterated all the pictures simultaneously. She fell back into knowledge of herself, felt herself slumped in the armchair, fell suddenly into the knowledge that what she had just witnessed was not a vision of her own inner thoughts but of the cruelty of the modern world, the world which said thou shalt not feel, thou shalt not be intense, thou shalt have no purpose, no meaning in life. What did it mean? What of her recent thoughts of extreme punishments? What did it all mean? She couldn't answer herself, she couldn't. And yet, it did not matter any more. She felt at peace. She knew for certain, with a certainty that came from a deep inner conviction and for which she could give herself no explanation, that she was innocent. She was pure. She was noble in



her feelings towards Marcia, even if she could not understand either her own feelings or Marcia's. Vague historical memories flitted across her mind; processions of self-flagellating monks and nuns winding their penitential way across Europe in the thirteenth century; earlier, the mysteries of Eleusis—hadn't she heard that ecstatic rites were enacted involving whippings? These feelings then, these strange, devouring ecstasies she and Marcia had begun to share had in their basis something ritual, something religious. They had stumbled, unled, across mysteries extinct in the West and perhaps as ancient as mankind itself and opened a kind of Pandora's box from which tumbled forth ancient rituals and harmonies long-forgotten and neglected, but powerful enough to shape themselves and come alive in minds which were receptive enough and pure enough, yes, and loving enough to receive them.

And the visions of cruelty? Sent by the Devil to tempt her to abuse of power and by God to teach her by analogy of the cruel, tormenting wickedness of the modern world and what its empty restrictions did to any sensitive soul trapped within it.

Miss Bethune felt the horror of the tortured inner selves of her vision in her own body and her heart ached in acute, stabbing compassion. She who was older, who had been born and brought up in a time of near-normality, was not tortured inwardly as these souls were. Her life was grounded in loving and being loved, by family, friends, neighbours, schoolmistresses; in growing up with praise of her good qualities ringing in her ears and delightful fusses made of any clevernesses; with sharp, fair admonitions of any straying from the path of duty and of attempting perfection; she had been rooted in a childhood world where little girls giggled happily in full-skirted dresses and little boys tumbled over on gravel in short, grey trousers with laughing, cherubic faces.

Innocence. She buried her face in her hands and rested it there a moment. She had never before realised so fully the death of innocence and what it must mean to the psyche to be deprived of the many gifts she had had. For she knew it to be so with a sudden, desperate clarity;—that most girls of Marcia's age lived in a vacuum and had had no proper childhood or love or praise or at-

tention, no proper mothering or guidance at all. "God help them!" she cried aloud in anguish, "God save them, the poor, poor darlings!" And she sobbed broken-heartedly into her hands.

As her sobs subsided she felt the friendly, reassuring warmth of her fingers pressed against her face. She knew that her touch was firm and clean, full of love and a strange, mysterious grace. She looked at her fingers in surprise. She had felt a great heat coming from them and yes, she could sense, see, no, not quite see, streams of light coming from her fingertips. She experimented, holding one hand above the other and feeling how far the light extended from them. She could feel the energy (she knew it was actually light because she could see a picture of it in her mind's eye at the same time) extended about three inches all round her hands. Her hands were healing hands; and so were her visions. She could sense it was so.

Comforted by her own touch as she was, Miss Bethune felt herself beginning to calm. She sensed the germ of a practical idea. In the back of her mind, vague thoughts were stirring; thoughts of how to keep the strange, new world of discipline she had entered intact and inviolate, protected from the bombardment of grey, everyday reality; thoughts which, as yet unformed, would muster and clarify and reach upwards till they ascended to the light of reason and the realm of action. Her heart lifted; unformed though the idea was, she recognised the sensation, knew it meant that a solution was inevitable, knew it would be thorough and workable. She was a queen in the realm of the practical; it was this world of silent communication and vivid pictures that was new to her.

As her mood lightened, she became aware that a pain lived on, an ache in her chest and stomach. Darkness was crowding in on her, darkness and desolation which should—surely?—have dissipated after her tears and her sense of coming resolution. She shut her eyes and instinctively held out her hands before her. She felt a warmth come out from her palms, a warmth that felt like the golden glow of the sun dipping behind pink clouds at eventide, a glow that brings peace and quietness. On the backcloth of her shut eyes a picture formed. Marcia! Marcia sitting upright in bed, rigid with terror—why? What could have happened to her, for

goodness' sake? She sought the whirlpool of desolation in her chest for an answer. Her mind probed it, somehow knowing that the clue to Marcia's state lay in her own interpretation of the swirl of feeling. What was the feeling? What did it mean?

Abandonment. Bereavement. The pain of rejection. Marcia was feeling abandoned and bereft. The question mark in her mind abruptly changed to a realisation. Of course! What had she been thinking of? There had been no word of contact, no affirmation of the connexion between them since the night of Marcia's first beating at her hands. Miss Bethune had been so absorbed in her, in their, new world of unexpected sympathies and sensations, pictures and magical moments, so engrossed in being strongly, but silently, linked with Marcia that she had quite forgotten that ordinary mortals need verbal reassurance as well.

She applied herself to the emergency in hand, and began directing the warmth which still streamed from her fingers. Marcia would feel better soon, if their inner communication was re-established. Marcia would feel better, and then Miss Bethune could telephone. All would be well.

Marcia sat upright, still immobilised, still absorbed in darkness. Then out of the darkness, she felt her face taken in two strong, warm hands, hands which seemed to throb with a heartbeat and say, "I am here, I am here, I am here."

She saw a small warm light glow in the blackness of the room, or was it within her eyes?—the sensation of being touched, of seeing the glow was so strong it overpowered her and she could not tell if her eyes were open or not. The glow expanded and into the centre of the rapidly-growing gold-red orb, she saw Miss Bethune's face, dear, already dear to her. Miss Bethune was shining with a sweet, unearthly love, a love of complete acceptance and understanding. Oooh! A little sob of relief crept from Marcia's parted lips. She was not alone. Oh, not to be alone! Not to be standing a little, insignificant spark of life in the great, grey sea of existence, but to have this, this—— what was the word for it? This intimacy, this intimacy of mind. How heavenly it was.

She sank back into her pillows with another sigh of relief. Her

heart was filled with gratitude at her release from isolation. She flung her gratitude heavenwards, knowing instinctively that this new tie which made her feel so safe, so enthralled, so real was forged somehow in Heaven. Oh what a lucky girl I am, she sang to a funny little tune of her own making, what a lucky girl I am, as she jumped from bed and ran, slipperless, to the bathroom.

Miss Bethune reached for the telephone and dialled Mrs. Hunter's number. She listened to the bell ringing and hoped strongly that it would be Alison, and not Marcia, who answered the call. Miss Bethune wanted—having, she felt sure, reassured Marcia by her loving thoughts—to set a seal of normality on what next occurred by speaking to her friend first.

Miss Bethune heard the receiver lifted, and Alison's voice giving her number.

"Good morning, darling. Cynthia here. I'm sorry I haven't been in touch earlier. I was thinking things over. I know it's awfully short notice, darling, but I wondered if it might be a good day to come over and get a bit of training from you, as you promised last week."

"Yes, Cynthia, please do. As it happens I can manage that easily. Got rather a quiet day today. If you can arrange to get here for about two, we'll have a couple of hours without interruption as Marcia's out and we can do all the training we want undisturbed."

"Oh, but——"

"I'm quite well aware that you wish to make sure of seeing Marcia today also, and there shouldn't be any difficulty about that. She won't be out all afternoon. Especially not if she knows you're coming."

"How has Marcia been these last few days?" asked Miss Bethune wondering how Marcia might have seemed to her mother.

"She's been different, Cynthia. She's been puzzling me rather. She's been a touch quiet, but also——" Alison broke off, obviously finding it hard to put her impressions into words. "Also *softer* somehow. More rounded at the edges, more *feminine*. Does that make sense, dear?"

Miss Bethune smiled to herself. She thought she understood. Marcia wanted to yield, wanted to submit herself to Miss

Bethune, and because of that desire to yield she was softer, and being softer, was more feminine.

Mrs. Hunter continued. "It's a question of atmosphere, I suppose, Cynthia. She just feels rather more, well, *appealing*. We've been getting on better together I think. I feel so anyway. I've felt warmer and friendlier towards her these last few days. She's been dressing differently. I'm not sure what she's done, but she seems younger and sweeter."

"Well that sounds interesting. I'll come along at two this afternoon then. Is Marcia there now?" Miss Bethune asked this a trifle nervously, wondering how she would feel actually speaking to Marcia after their inward and intense communication.

"Yes, darling. I'll get her for you." Miss Bethune heard Mrs. Hunter put the receiver down carefully and call out to Marcia.

"Darling," she heard Mrs. Hunter's voice call out faintly, "Miss Bethune's on the telephone."

Miss Bethune heard footsteps hurriedly descending the stairs and then a slightly breathless voice saying, "Miss Bethune?"

"Good morning, Marcia." Then before she knew she was going to say anything of the kind, she felt her tone harden into an authoritative note. "I trust you have behaved yourself well since I last saw you."

"Oh yes, Miss Bethune. I think so." Marcia's voice was soft, with a note of pleading in it. For approval? For punishment? For both? Miss Bethune decided it was for both.

"Good. I'm glad to hear that. I shall be seeing your mother this afternoon." She heard a sharp intake of breath, and sensed the girl's sudden stab of disappointment. "I understand that you will not be in till later this afternoon—" she paused, while Marcia slipped in an obedient "Yes, ma'am"— "but," Miss Bethune continued, her voice hardening again, "I shall be seeing you as soon as you return. You tell me you have been behaving well since we last met, and I am sure you have. But I am going to make sure you continue to behave well. Do you understand me, Marcia? I shall be giving you a good thrashing just because it pleases me to do so."

Marcia was silent for a moment. Miss Bethune could feel shiv-

ery delightful feelings, especially in her legs which felt weak, and knew that they originated with Marcia. Then a quiet voice replied. "Yes, ma'am. I shall look forward to seeing you later on this afternoon."

Miss Bethune arrived promptly at two o'clock, the bus having presented no difficulties or delays this time. Mrs. Hunter greeted her warmly as she opened the door and ushered her friend in.

"Cynthia, it's lovely to see you again. I've got some implements and a table and chair ready. Everything is all set." She took Miss Bethune through to the large drawing room where she had last seen Marcia. There in the middle of the room were positioned a small rectangular table and a wooden chair. On the sideboard, its surface cleared of its customary ornaments, were laid out a leather strap, stained a dark brown colour, a crook-handled cane and a straight piece of rattan without a curved handle.

"These, my dear, are the main tools of the trade. Obviously there are a lot of other implements one can use as I expect you remember from the days when I looked after you before. Hair-brushes, slippers, plimsolls, even a wooden spoon, are all handy household items, though a good old-fashioned clothes brush is better than a hairbrush whose handle tends to be a bit short for a good grip. Then there are wooden and leather paddles; both very useful for an over-the-knee spanking.

"But," continued Mrs. Hunter, "I thought we would learn something about more formal implements today, the ones that take the practice. Let us begin with the switch. Of course, you've already used this on Marcia. All the more reason for you to feel what it's like," she said as she picked up the piece of straight rattan. "It's not as difficult to use as the cane, nor, usually as hard to receive, but it gives a jolly good idea of how the cane feels if you use it hard enough."

Miss Bethune felt her mouth go dry and her heart seemed as though it was beating faster. Now that the moment was near she realised that she was very frightened of being punished. She watched Alison's manner. She was relaxed and confident, obviously taking to the function of teaching her friend without a hint

of embarrassment. But it wasn't like that for Miss Bethune. She felt hideously embarrassed. She wanted to run away out of the room. At any moment Mrs. Hunter was going to ask her to bend over onto the table.

Mrs. Hunter did ask her at that moment, and Cynthia Bethune the schoolchild, immediately obedient and a slavish devotee of her older protectress, stepped forward inside her and made her body bend properly over the table. She was calm; suddenly, she was calm. The habits of years past had awoken in her and everything seemed familiar, usual. She felt Alison lift up her skirt and tuck it neatly round her waist. She felt Alison's hand near the hem of her petticoat and wondered if that was to be lifted too. But no. Alison tucked Cynthia's petticoat in between her thighs in a practical, off-hand manner, and for a moment she felt vulnerable and out of sorts again.

Miss Bethune, with her arms stretched across the table and her chest pressed against its surface, had a strange swimming feeling in her mind. She was at once a respectable mature lady who felt somewhat odd practically lying over the table with her skirt raised and an eager schoolgirl happy to be of use to the friend she so much admired. Except that it was not quite that way this time; this time things were the other way round and whatever happened between them was because Alison had volunteered to be of use to her.

Her reflections were cut short by a light sharp pain across her petticoated bottom.

"That, my dear, is to remind you what the general feeling of rattan is. Sharp, isn't it?" The enquiry was punctuated by a second stroke, also sharp, also firm but fairly light, like a caress of fire. "A dozen altogether," pronounced Mrs. Hunter.

The strokes continued, laid evenly and regularly across Miss Bethune's bottom and the tops of her thighs. The strokes hurt more there, winced Miss Bethune to herself, where there is less clothing to protect one. She felt very relieved that Alison had not lifted her petticoat.

Miss Bethune could tell that Mrs. Hunter was being very business-like. She was, in an off-hand, practical sort of way, Miss

Bethune realised, giving her an element of warming-up before a severer punishment. There was no sense of melting, no sense of a special union such as she had experienced so unexpectedly with Mrs. Hunter's daughter, but there was, she had to admit, a feeling of giving in to the punishment itself, a sense of being warmed by it and prepared for what was to come.

But what was to come? Miss Bethune was smitten inwardly with panic. She wanted to rise up and halt the proceedings. But it was too late, and anyway the Cynthia of the past was lying still over the table, quietly accepting Alison's command. Mrs. Hunter was speaking now, and she could hear her replacing the switch on the sideboard and picking up something else.

"I'm going to use the cane now, Cynthia. I'll show you afterwards how to achieve a good stroke, how to keep your arm in the right position and how to get strength in the stroke. For now I just want you to accept what I decide to give you."

Miss Bethune could feel a change in the atmosphere. A deep sense of concentration was emanating from Mrs. Hunter as she paused before giving the first stroke. Everything seemed very serious and purposeful. Miss Bethune heard a few swishes in the air and tightened her pose over the table in fear. She heard Alison's voice commenting on her suddenly increased tension, talking to her about how useful such fear-producing effects could be if any one seemed blasée, but she couldn't take in the words and make proper sense of them; she was too distracted with her fear.

Mrs. Hunter stopped talking and in the pause Miss Bethune could imagine the cane being raised high in the air. She felt so vulnerable, her arms spreadeagled as though for some strange sacrifice. She heard the cane rush through the air and land, squarely and devastatingly hard full across her bottom. Her breath was expelled in an unconscious rush as the pain shot through her. It rose to a sharp crescendo so intense it was hard not to cry out, and then subsided unexpectedly soon.

But the reprieve from pain was brief. Four, maybe five seconds passed and she heard the second stroke coming. This time the line of fire was laid across the exact path of the previous stroke. A little sob broke from her lips. But she was not rebellious;



she was submitted. She hated each stroke as the third, and then the fourth fell, and yet she liked it. Not in the normal way you like something because it is pleasant but because she could, to her own surprise, feel each stroke as a burst of fire passing through her, knew its purifying effect, believed that the caning was beneficial.

After the sixth stroke Mrs. Hunter replaced her skirt and told her to stand up. Miss Bethune stood, relieved that she was to be spared any further demonstrations for the present. Mrs. Hunter told her friend to sit down and went to make tea. Miss Bethune sat in her chair feeling sore and yet more alive than she had done when she arrived, more alive than she had since her last unspoken union with Marcia. She was pleased to have experienced the cane for she felt she knew more of what Marcia must feel.

After the welcome cup of tea Mrs. Hunter launched into technical descriptions of how to administer the cane, jumping up at intervals to demonstrate on a cushion carefully balanced over the edge of the table various points of her narrative. She made Miss Bethune get up and hold the cane just so, move her wrist thus, make sure the cane never went behind her shoulder—in short, put Miss Bethune through her paces rigorously. After Mrs. Hunter was satisfied with Miss Bethune's progress, she moved on to the strap, letting her feel the sting of mild slaps on her palm, making her receive proper stinging strokes on an outstretched palm, over the petticoat, on bare flesh at the top of her thighs. Miss Bethune felt swept along by the forcefulness of her friend and almost overwhelmed by the amount of detail she was hearing. She felt like a doll whose arms and legs and torso were being moved at will by another and compelled to stay in the position in which the limbs had been placed.

A slight worry entered under the surface of her almost enjoyable passivity. Time, something about time. Yes, Marcia would be returning soon. She, Miss Bethune, had received but she had not given. That should happen also; it had been agreed—that she should practise her new knowledge on her friend. A bubble of determination rose up from beneath her puppet-like acquiescence and found its way to the surface in speech and action.

Miss Bethune rose sharply to her feet, and assumed a tone of command quite without thinking. "Alison. Stand up and go to the table please. It is time for me to practise what you have taught me."

Mrs. Hunter, caught in mid-sentence, was shocked into immediate silence and obedience. She would never have thought her old friend was capable of taking such a tone. She would never have thought that she herself would feel so compelled to obey her. She went to stand quietly in front of the table and awaited further instructions.

"Bend over, Alison," Miss Bethune ordered. "Place yourself *very* firmly over the table. I am going to demonstrate that I have absorbed very fully the lessons you have given me. I am about to give you a number of brief punishments with the different implements of which we have been learning, and, let me make myself quite clear, I expect complete stillness, willing acquiescence and absolute obedience."

When Marcia returned home some half hour later she met her mother in the entrance hall on her way to make more tea. As she smiled hello to her mother she realised, with a start of surprise, that she looked entirely different from usual. Her face seemed rounder and softer, and her eyes were glistening prettily as though she had cried just a little. She looked altogether younger.

Marcia realised with a shock of surprise, almost of jealousy, that Miss Bethune had been giving Mummie punishments. Goodness! What surprises were sprung on one at the moment. She liked the feeling though, as she mulled the new thought over while taking off her coat and hanging it up. Yes, it gave her a feeling of closeness to her mother, a sense of a sanctuary within the home, the home which had become a place of order and harmony. She had not appreciated the harmony before when the punishments came only from her mother, but now she could feel a secret bonding between the three of them, a link that bound them together. Punishment that was dry, as between herself and her mother, and she suspected, if it had occurred, between her mother and Miss Bethune, and punishment that was sweet and yielding between

Miss Bethune and herself, and surely, judging by her mother's extraordinarily-softened face, between Miss Bethune and Mummie—such punishments, dry and ordinary, sweet and yielding, both were necessary for a sense of harmony. She could not say how she knew this; she just felt it to be so. She put her hand on the doorknob to go in to Miss Bethune, to face the thrashing she had been told of with acceptance and happiness. She knew that, though she would never face her mother's punishments with the degree of yielding acceptance that brought a thrill of utter submission, she would accept her punishments with a newly open heart. She would accept the tapestry that was being woven, between the dry and the sweet, the hard and the yielding, between the three souls. She would embrace the future and help preserve their sanctuary.

Miss Bethune waited on the other side of the drawing room door with a soft smile of satisfaction on her lips. It was not merely happy anticipation of the punishment about to be given to Marcia with all its intimate and magical depths. It was not merely satisfaction at having ruled over Alison for the first time ever and having had the delightful experience of seeing her yield and soften unexpectedly. No, it was more even than the comforting sense of unity between them with Alison coming to understand in some small way what electrical things happened between Miss Bethune and her daughter. She knew now what the practical idea was that was just below the surface of her mind earlier that morning.

Over her last visit and this she had felt herself come to life with a feminine command; she had seen first the daughter and then the mother relinquish a dullness and a hardness that kept them from being fully feminine; the one because she had grown a little dull over the years; the other hard with the hardness of the modern girl cut off from her true femininity.

She would have, she and Alison would have, a school for femininity. A sort of finishing school for willing daughters of willing old friends, where the young women, by submitting themselves to the rule and education of the older women, would begin to find the softness, the innocence and the sweetness emerging now

in Marcia. She felt the reins in her hands; though it existed only in her imagination, though she had not even told Alison of her new plans, she knew it would come to pass. She would create a sanctuary for more than Marcia, for more than the small household of which she felt now almost a part. She would help drive away the poisons of the soulless world the girls had been born into. She and Alison would provide a sanctuary which would be imbued with femininity and firmness, with sound values and warm-heartedness, and give those young women who chose to come a sense of connectedness so different from the world they drifted through, and a new innocence after purification.

"Come in, Marcia," she called out as she heard a faint knock. She stood up, her heart singing, ready to take the first step towards building a new world.



*Memories of a Victorian Governess*

by Julie Hutton



## *Memories of a Victorian Governess*

Children in my young days were handed over to the charge of their governess and presented at intervals, suitably polished and well-behaved, to their parents who were not otherwise concerned as to the methods employed for educating them.

I begin with memories of my first post. I had been an assistant governess for some time but eventually I had successfully passed my interviews for my first post as a proper governess. I was formally introduced to the three girls who would be my charges; their ages were twelve, fifteen and nineteen years respectively. I had also met the retiring governess, a viperous mean-looking woman, with whom I had nothing in common.

The day came for me to take over, and after a short talk with the master and mistress I joined my charges in the school room. All girlish chatter ceased the moment I placed my hand on the door handle. I entered to hear my three charges say politely, "Good morning", and watched as they stood there with their heads hanging down like whipped dogs. The eldest girl plucked up courage and informed me that the rods were kept in the cupboard. I thanked her for the information and then asked her what she had done to deserve a whipping.

She said, "Nothing, miss."

I replied, "Then I will not require a rod, will I?"

Something seemed wrong and I needed to find out what it was and establish a new feeling of trust. I sat in the armchair and pulled the youngest into my lap, settling her comfily. She snuggled against me in a slightly awkward way that suggested to me that she was unused to affection. I directed the elder two to sit down on the chairs and started a general conversation with the intention of drawing them out, and encouraging them to talk freely. The little one on my lap did not know how to rest easily in the position she found herself. As the conversation progressed her head rested on my breast and her arm tentatively crept around my neck. I responded to her caress by giving her a kiss on the fore-

head. On noticing this simple act, the sense of restraint in the air dissipated suddenly and the eldest girl, Mary, explained that when the previous governess had arrived, she had demanded a rod and quite severely birched all three of them. Such had been the previous governess's introduction to her new charges. I shuddered, feeling shocked that a person should do such a thing apparently without reason apart from a desire to dominate and instil fear.

I told the girls that I also used the birch rod and if I had to use it they would smart soundly, but I explained that no girl would be birched unless the offence demanded a sound punishment or the girl had failed to learn after milder correction, making a severer chastisement necessary. I also said if a birching did not bring the girl to her senses, the cane would be used. I added that I trusted that they were good girls and such measures would never be required.

By this time we had been talking together for nearly two hours and the girls were beginning to feel safer with me, even to the point that they were telling me their little secrets as girls will with someone they trust. I was overjoyed that they had responded so well, though I was aware I must not fall into the trap of leniency, but quickly achieve a balance.

I noticed that Ann kept moving about as she sat on my lap and I asked her what was wrong and why she could not sit still. She buried her face in my shoulder with a sudden movement and seemed unable to speak. Mary answered for her, explaining that she had been birched only yesterday. I asked what she had done and how many strokes she had received. Mary told me that Ann had been bouncing on her bed, and had been given fifteen strokes as a punishment. A spanking would have been enough for such an offence in my opinion, I thought to myself.

I asked her to lift her skirts so that I might examine her marks. She did as she was asked. What I saw filled me with horror. The child was badly marked on her hips where the birch had, either by accident or by design, been allowed to whip round onto the tender hips breaking the skin in places. I went to my bag and took out some cream which I smoothed into her thighs and hips, then



giving the cream to Mary I instructed her to do the same to Ann again before bed time. I was very angry but as I did not want the girls to sense my anger I used the excuse that I wanted to unpack and sent them out for a walk in the grounds.

As soon as they had left I went to the cupboard where Mary had told me the rods were kept. I found two rods soaking in a brine solution. Such a procedure was a common practice in a lot of establishments at this time as it increased the severity of the individual switches. I lifted one of the rods out of the brine and found it to be a very formidable instrument, twenty-eight inches long and made up of twelve switches. I rang for the maid and instructed her to take the rods and destroy them and refill the bucket with clean water. I decided to replace the rods by the next day. I was sure that all that would be necessary was a rod made up of seven switches two foot long, soaked in plain water.

Over the next week I made every effort to be friendly as well as firm with the girls and to win their confidence without losing any authority. It transpired that it had been the practice to flog them twice a week, even before their skin returned to normal. It was an exceptional day when they did not at least have the fading marks of the last flogging. The offences for which such severe punishment had been awarded were considered quite minor ones by me for which I would only hand spank them, or at the most, slipper them.

Over the next three weeks, apart from setting extra work, I had no reason to discipline the girls, but they still walked about tentatively as though they thought the roof was going to fall in on them. They were very subdued and there was no liveliness or spirit such as you would expect to find in three healthy girls.

I had set the girls some work and decided that as it was a nice day we would work outside. While they worked, I checked the exercises they had done the previous day. The two younger children had done quite well, but when I looked at the eldest girl's efforts, it was obvious she had not applied herself at all and had been day dreaming. I had spoken to her before about lack of effort and I decided that a taste of the hairbrush was required to wake her up. I called her to me and as I admonished her, her head sank

down on to her chest. I instructed her to go to the schoolroom telling her I would be up to punish her directly.

It was some time before I left the two youngest, first making sure they had sufficient work so that they would not get into mischief. I went to my room and collected the hairbrush from my dressing table. On arrival at the schoolroom I found that Mary had taken a rod and placed it on the chair, and then turned back her linen. Her petticoats were bunched around her waist as she bent over the desk.

“Stand up, Mary, and return the rod to the cupboard. I shall decide when you needed birching. It is not your place to assume to read my mind.”

I then turned her over my knee, lifted up her skirt and petticoats, folding the layers out of my way and proceeded to give her bottom a brisk spanking with the hairbrush. I talked to her as I beat her, reminding her that I would not tolerate laziness, and if she did not wish a repeat of what was an embarrassing punishment for a girl of her age, she had better mend her ways. I then allowed her to stand, told her to give me a nice curtsey and sent her off to join her sisters.

I made some lemon drinks before I returned to the grounds having decided that after our drinks we would play a game to give us some exercise before returning to work. I sat on the ground with them and soon the chatter was flowing freely. I could not help but notice a lightening in their manner. Mary joined in the conversation and was quite light hearted and very much brighter than I had known her before. Although I noticed she was careful how she moved her bottom it became apparent from the girls' conversation that both she and her sisters thought her punishment would have been two dozen or even thirty strokes of the birch.

From this day forward we did not look back, though of course they were punished and even, on occasion, birched. They accepted their punishments quietly and without rancour as healthy children should. They would come to me with their problems, and I had their complete trust. At Christmas I was sure to get a present and my birthday was never forgotten, and I, of course, did not forget theirs.

I made no secret of my disapproval of punishments of an undue severity. This made me very unpopular with certain governesses in close-by establishments, for there were more than a few who, like my predecessor, just loved to flog for no other reason than that they enjoyed it. These governesses spoke against me and tried to get me dismissed, but by this time I had the support of the housekeeper; herself no idler when the maids required correction. Like all good butlers and housekeepers she had the ear of the master and mistress and due to her good influence I remained secure in my post.

It became a very happy house, the girls were always cheerful and their work improved beyond measure. The hunted look left their eyes and they felt secure and happy under my firm but fair jurisdiction. I felt considerable distress when I had to move on to another position.

My next position was in a far larger household in the country. The house was a large manor, with stables and coach house, all standing in its own grounds. There was a tract of land supervised by the gamekeeper reserved for the breeding of pheasants for the master and his friends to shoot in the season. There was good fishing available on the stream that ran through the estate. The country thereabouts was hedged and eminently suitable for hunting, all the gentlemen of the area keeping full and three-quarter blood horses for this purpose.

The master was a cavalry colonel who had the reputation of being a martinet. My charges were four girls, the three youngest of whom, whose ages ranged from eight to fifteen, were introduced to me on arrival. They seemed normal healthy girls who were pleasing to look at and to be with. The eldest girl, Jane, would be returning soon from a school in France where she had been sent in the hope that they could cure her of her bad behaviour. The cure, it seemed, had not worked, for the school had informed the master that Jane was being expelled at the end of term and sent home.

In my initial interview the master had told me that I had been recommended to him as a disciplinarian and he was depending on my being able to do something for Jane otherwise he was fearful

of her chances of marrying well. I was told I had a free hand to do as I thought best and this I determined to act upon.

There were two weeks for the other girls to settle into my routine before Jane was due to arrive home. The only incident requiring correction in that time was when Martha, the eldest of the three, spilt ink over her books. I was not so terribly cross for accidents can happen to the best of us, but I became cross when she tried to lie her way out of trouble. For this I gave her a soundly slipped bottom, which I trusted would help her be more truthful, and careful, in future.

Jane arrived home. She was a fine-looking girl with signs of intelligence and clear potential yet it was obvious from her manner that she was quite pleased with herself for once again defying authority and being expelled. When we were introduced, she eyed me up and down appraisingly with an air of defiance like a prizefighter eyeing his opponent before a fight. I quietly decided to myself that I was going to work hard to put her in her place.

All remained calm for the first two days after Jane's arrival but I was fully aware that the first challenge would not be long in coming. The quiet underlying tension between us came to a head one afternoon. Jane had played a spiteful trick on one of the maids which had caused her to drop a heavily-laden tray. The maid was very upset, for she was worried about having to explain the breakages and the punishment that would surely follow. I sent the maid out of the room and assured her that I would speak to the housekeeper and the mistress if necessary and make sure that she would not be blamed for the accident.

Turning to Jane I admonished her for her childish behaviour against one who was not in a position to defend herself. Saying that those who acted like children would be treated like children, I took hold of her arm and pulled her quickly to a convenient chair where I sat down and dragged her over my lap. Jane had been too surprised at the sudden turn of events to offer any resistance but now as I reached down to pull back her skirt and petticoat her hand came back and tried to prevent my carrying out my intentions. I promptly secured her arm up her back and continued drawing her skirts and petticoats up her back, revealing as

I did so her fine linen lace-trimmed drawers. I tucked the loose material of these very firmly into the top of her thighs, giving her a taut, sharp outline to her bottom and proceeded to give a full-blooded spanking on both cheeks. The first two dozen hard strokes only produced a few sharp intakes of breath, and I spanked on, determined to reach a point where she would beg me to stop. Jane began moving her hips on my lap in a vain effort to evade my punishing hand. After about fifty blows, she began to cry at each resounding smack, cries which culminated in her calling out that her bottom was on fire and please would I stop. I spanked on for another dozen strokes and then allowed her to stand. As I thought shaming her would help make her childish punishment more memorable, I stood her in the corner with her skirt and petticoats tucked up so that her be-drawered bottom was on view to anyone who entered the room, including of course her younger sisters. Jane was too shaken by her long punishment to think of resisting and stood quietly where I had placed her.

After about twenty minutes I called her to me and asked her if she wanted clashes between us to continue, for if they did the punishments would undoubtedly increase in severity, or had she learned her lesson. For my part I would much rather treat her as a young lady than as a young child, but that if this were to be the case she had to respect my authority and behave properly while under my charge. I told her to put her dress back in order and think seriously over what I had said. Looking very shame-faced, she did as I bid her. It was clear that I had won the first skirmish, but I knew well that a skirmish won is not the whole battle. I hoped this would not prove to be the case but it was quite possible that as soon as she had got over her shame, the battle would recommence.

I was fully prepared to meet the challenge if this should occur, but over the next week Jane was careful to give me no cause to find fault with her. Her sisters in particular were surprised at the change in her behaviour to them; as Jane had previously been somewhat of a bully towards them. I appreciated the calm while it persisted but had a curious feeling that it was only the lull before the storm.

When the storm did come it arose from a completely unexpected quarter. Jane was quite an accomplished horsewoman. She had been given charge of a fine thoroughbred mare to train for dressage, and she had been training her with considerable success. Jane had undertaken to work the mare herself at morning exercises as she did not want her mouth spoilt. In order to have the mare ready for a forthcoming dressage competition, the head groom had increased the animal's corn and this meant that regular and thorough riding work was essential for proper exercise and the development of muscles. Hard work was even more essential as the animal was fully fit and bursting with high-spiritedness. Unfortunately, as I was soon to discover, Jane's idea of riding work was to go off into the woods, dismount and sit reading under the trees.

The estate had a well-appointed indoor school run by the head groom who was an injured sergeant major from the Colonel's regiment. He was responsible for everything equestrian and he was excellent at his work.

One morning Jane left the house with the intention of working the mare at the school. Her sisters and I settled down to our morning routine and we had just had a break when one of the maids burst in and informed me that I was wanted urgently at the stables. Thinking that Jane had met with an accident, I hurried down to the stables arriving very short of breath.

As I drew near the stables, my ears were assaulted by rough and coarse language fit only for the barracks room, among whose choice phrases I caught the words: "She should have the skin flogged from her back!" On catching sight of me, the head groom muttered a hasty apology for his language, though it took him a moment to calm himself even to this extent, for he was so red-faced he looked on the verge of bursting with fury.

I stood by quietly while he struggled to calm himself. As he strove for control my eyes wandered towards Jane's mare who was standing close by. She, who was normally a kind animal, was standing with a rug over her to prevent a chill and looking all wild-eyed. The head groom walked over to the mare and pulled the rug up to her withers.

"Just look what Miss Jane has done to this poor beast," he said furiously to me. The mare had several long weals running down her flanks, and there were signs of a sharp spur being used which had broken the skin. As it happened I came from a cavalry family and this sight made me as angry as it made him. I asked the groom where Miss Jane had gone and he told me that she had put the mare in the box and stormed up to the house. She had made no attempt to treat the animal, or even to throw a rug over her. It was purely by chance that the mare had been discovered and attended to as quickly as she had.

I put my hand on his arm and assured him that I would be dealing with the matter as soon as I went up to the house. It was quite obvious that Jane had been misusing her dressage whip in an appalling manner. Meant to supply elegance and, when used properly, instructions to the horse, it yet had the ability to cut the horse's flesh like a knife.

I returned to the house and asked a maid to find Miss Jane and inform her that I wanted to see her immediately. After a short while Jane knocked on the door and I told her to come in. On her entrance she made to sit down but I spoke to her very sharply and told her to stand up straight.

"I have just come from the stables," I said, "and the sight I have seen there fills me with revulsion and horror. I cannot believe that any one could use an animal so."

Jane stood red-faced with her head down; a picture of guilt that did nothing to assuage my anger. At that moment I could have cheerfully taken the same whip and used it on her. I demanded an explanation as to how the mare had been hurt. She told me that she had taken the mare to the school with the intention of preparing for the coming competition. The mare had been mettlesome and would not settle. Finally she had started to rear and buck, and every time she had done so, Jane had whipped her to teach her a lesson.

I asked her why she thought the mare had behaved in that way and the sad tale of the neglect of her responsibilities came out. In exasperation I spoke to her about how the head groom was feeding the mare for work, how the mare was fully-fit and full

of fire and that work was absolutely essential to develop muscle and exercise her.

I continued, frowning fiercely at her: "Because of your laziness and lack of responsibility you have brought her to a sorry state and your wicked lack of control means that she might be scarred for life.

"I intend to punish you most severely. However I am not going to administer it now. I shall postpone the punishment until I can once more view you with detachment as one capable of being humane. For the present the sight of you offends me too much. Remove yourself from my presence."

Jane turned hurriedly and left the room quickly to escape from my fury. Shortly afterwards I received a summons that the master and mistress desired to see me in the drawing room. It transpired that the master had returned home and gone to the stables to hand his charger over to the groom. He had found the groom attending to the mare's wounds. He questioned him, was told what had occurred and had left the stables slashing the air with his riding whip with a face like thunder. All who saw him pass had quickly drawn back to make themselves invisible; no one got in the master's way when he was in this mood. A cavalryman's love for his horse is one based on trust between them; he knows his very life can depend on the animal beneath him. Nothing can anger him more than the abuse of a horse.

As the butler announced me, I entered the room and found the master pacing the room with his whip flexed, his knuckles white with the tightness of his grip. The mistress sat still in a corner looking startled and somewhat frightened at her husband's fierceness. For a brief moment, a vision flashed through my mind of Miss Jane secured to a flogging triangle like a trooper in front of the assembled staff. He was certainly angry enough to do it.

Turning his attention to me, he demanded to know what action I had taken. I explained to him what my intentions were. The punishment I had in mind calmed him down somewhat, though he plied me with advice about getting a stout well-seasoned birch and making sure it was well-laid on his daughter's bottom. After some more fatherly advice, I was dismissed.



The master's ferocious anger had led him to make some rather extreme comments and these I ignored, though I was not feeling any leniency for Miss Jane; I intended to give her the thrashing of her life, one she would remember for years to come. I returned to my room and took out of my cupboard a stiff, dark-coloured cane, one of the kind that made English governesses so feared and respected. I had never yet had occasion to use it, but I had seen my mentor use one so I was fully aware of its capabilities. I gave it some experimental swishes and, as I now felt ready, sent for Jane's personal maid.

When she arrived, I instructed her to inform her mistress that her presence was required. I had arranged that one of the other maids would be present at the appointed hour. They all arrived together, with a blushing Jane standing between the two servants. I saw Jane's eyes flicker towards the table where the cane was displaying its slender malevolent length. I saw a look of apprehension flash across her face.

I ordered Jane's maid to take off her mistress's dress and many layers of petticoats until she stood before me clad only in her undershift and more intimate garments. As I ordered her to bend over the table, her nerve broke and she tried to get away. The maids took hold of her and prevented this. I announced that there would be an extra stroke on her punishment for having resisted, and an extra stroke for every second that she was not in the place I had put her. She decided then that resistance was useless and would only add to her punishment. She bent reluctantly over the table and, at a sign from me, the maidservants secured an arm each in a tight grip.

I walked up to her and lifted her remaining petticoat. Jane whimpered a little in fear, as the full realisation of the punishment to come swept over her. I picked up the cane and flexed its slender length between my hands and swished it a few times. On hearing the sibilant hiss of the cane as it travelled through the air, all three girls shuddered. The maidservants instinctively took a firmer grip and pulled Jane down taut over the table so that her bottom was in a good position.

I laid the tip and the first few inches across the bottom, tapped

gently and informed Jane that I was about to begin, the maids making sure Jane was secure as I said this. I brought the cane up above my shoulders and with a turn of the wrist brought it hissing down and with a further flick of the wrist I impelled it across the waiting cheeks following through with the stroke forcefully. The stroke landed hard and squarely across both cheeks in a most satisfactory manner. Jane sucked in her breath sharply, wriggling her hips as though the movement of the air might cool the line of torment. The third stroke resulted in a strangled scream. I carried on caning her slowly, allowing her to feel the full effect of each stroke. Each time the cane landed, she let out a little squeal of pain, though it was quite clear that her pride was fighting to hold back her tears. After the tenth stroke, the struggle was lost, and she cried quite openly as I continued to cane her. She was wise enough however, not to utter any verbal protests or complaints, and of course, I should have added extra strokes if she had displeased me in this way. The thirteenth stroke which I had awarded her for resistance, I sent into the crease between her bottom and the top of her thighs.

When the punishment was over, I signed to the maids to release her. She lay in place still, crying quietly to herself. After a while she was told to get up and as she stood with her eyes streaming tears and her hands still behind her, one leg and then the other would lift as she tried to ease the sting.

"Now you have some idea what your mare feels like, Jane. You have taken your punishment well, and that is now an end to the matter. I forgive you and still love you in spite of your faults and the trouble you have caused your mama and papa. Do you accept, Jane, that you have been dealt with fairly?"

"Yes, madam, I deserved it. I love my mare and yet she suffered because of my spoilt temper."

"Whether your mare will forgive you remains to be seen. You will have to work hard to regain her trust. Now go to your room and lie down until dinner. I will be in shortly to tend to you."

Dinner was a trying time for Jane for the hard chairs did not agree with her sore bottom but in spite of this she appeared

brighter and more content than she had since her return. After dinner she asked if she might go to the stables. Speaking privately to me after her visit, the old sergeant-major told me that it did his old heart good to see the two well-thrashed girls comforting each other. He was convinced that Miss Jane was on the path back to better behaviour.

Even though it was several days before Jane could sit with any comfort, she bore no resentment, and in fact the old sergeant-major proved to be correct in his prophecy of reform for she never once returned to her old behaviour, and in general became a much more biddable and well-behaved girl.

Jane and her mare returned to harmony and though she did not win the dressage competition, she succeeded in coming third. This was a good result, considering the competition she was riding against. Her placing, and Jane's pluck in admitting her fault and practising hard for the dressage competition, restored her to her father's favour for above all he admired courage and resolution.

A year and a half later Jane was married. Shortly after her marriage she surprised me greatly by suggesting that I should join her household as her companion so that I should be on hand to repeat the treatment if she should cause her husband the trouble she had caused her parents. I did not, in fact, think this to be a very likely occurrence, but I could tell that Jane truly wished me to be close to her. Being as fond of her as I was by this time, I agreed to the change.

One afternoon we were whiling away time by talking over the past and we happened to talk of her caning.

"You know," she said, "I would never have put myself in the position of receiving another caning. I cannot describe how much it hurt, but even so, that was not the real reason for my change of behaviour. What caused my inner determination to be better was when you said that I could be forgiven. This softened my heart and set me thinking and somehow I realised the distress I had caused my parents whom I drove to distraction, I really understood the pain I had caused my mare. I saw myself for the first time as others saw me and I did not much like what I saw. Despite

the way I was, you stood there saying I could be forgiven. How much you must have loved me to say that after all I had done. I could see in your eyes that you meant every word.

"You asked me if I thought my punishment was fair, and even though my bottom felt as hot as though I had been sitting on cook's range, I answered truthfully in the affirmative. For the first time in my life, there was no murmur of rebellion in me. I felt completely at peace. You have a very strong arm, madam. If I think back to that caning, I can feel it as strongly as if it only happened yesterday."

We laughed together at the memory. She continued. "During the period when my parents were trying to tame me, I received a considerable number of beatings at various establishments. I have been birched, once I was given three dozen strokes, and strapped. When I was in France, they used a nine-tailed whip which was very nasty because the lashes could not be controlled and they fell everywhere. I have also been caned.

"In all these beatings I took comfort in the fact that I could take the punishments awarded and not be broken. In my mind I was saying that though they might do their worst, they would not break me, and they did not, although they tried hard.

The day I was so soundly defeated by you, the cane you used had me broken by the third stroke. I dreaded the next stroke. I honestly thought I could not survive it."

"How did it feel? Can you describe it?" I asked her curiously.

She thought for a moment, and then said, "I believe I can. The sting of the stroke is ferocious, but this on its own could be tolerated. It was the burning that follows each stroke, the burning was like a hot iron laid on a wound. It felt so much like that that I was surprised when I touched my bottom to find that the skin was not cut. You certainly laid it on with a vengeance, madam."

"I am sorry but after all, you only got what you were asking for. You had had a long run. The governess who trained me said that if one needed to use that particular cane made of the dark rattan that it showed all else had failed. She instructed me to be sure

to use it with plenty of strength in my arm and a flexible wrist. Although it caused quite definite weals which were painful at the time, they were only superficial and no lasting damage would be done. It was certain that the culprit however, would remember the caning for years. Our conversation today proves her right about that."

I stayed with Jane until I married myself, during which time she was blessed with twins. We remained friends for many years, a link made all the closer by our husbands serving in the same regiment. As my children began to arrive I devoted my life to them, having to be both father and mother with my husband serving his country. I brought them up strictly of course and needless to say not one of the eight brought a shadow of disharmony nor ever disgraced me.

*Angela gets a Caning*

by Rosalind Turner



## *Angela gets a Caning*

**T**he headmistress flexed her cane before taking one step back, and looked calmly at the knickered seat of the girl bending over a chair in front of her. She measured the distance with her eye, and then gently tapped the cane across the girl's knickers to ensure her aim. She repeated this action four more times, and then without warning, she drew the cane as far back as she could, and released it with full force across the girl's seat. The cane landed with a resounding crack! on the lower part of her bottom, precisely where the headmistress intended it to. The girl gasped, shifted her feet slightly and tightened her grip on the legs of the chair, but managed to remain in position. The headmistress administered a second stroke, with the same force as before, in a slightly different place, as she intended. Again the girl gasped and shifted her feet before resuming her position. The headmistress continued in similar fashion until she had administered the traditional 'six of the best'. Breathing slightly harder than normal, she lowered her cane, and surveyed the seat of the girl's knickers for about sixty seconds, before telling her that she could rise.

The girl rose, also breathing hard, her face red from the exertion of enduring the punishment, with a hint of moisture in her eyes. Her seat throbbed with pain, and she wriggled uncomfortably as the headmistress addressed her with a few remarks before dismissing her from the study.

"Angela. You have today learnt the penalty for wilfully failing to do your homework. Such idleness will not be tolerated. Any repetition of this behaviour and you will be punished with even greater severity. You are dismissed."

Angela proceeded to her mathematics lesson, where she sat down in considerable discomfort, unable to concentrate. Lying in bed (on her side naturally) that night she brooded on her punishment. This was a fateful mistake. Instead of accepting her punishment and learning the lesson from it, she began to resent it. Angela had not been caned before, and she was imbued with the

ideology of the modern world, with its ludicrous notions of equality and teachings that corporal punishment was degrading. She therefore resented the punishment she had just received.

The headmistress, Miss Constance Eagleton, had recently been appointed as head of T—— Academy, a pedagogical establishment for young ladies aged eighteen to twenty-one. One of the reasons why she had been appointed was her excellent record in maintaining discipline in the establishments where she had previously been the head. She believed firmly in the value of severe and ritualised corporal punishment, and her methods were esteemed by those concerned at the morally corrosive effects of trendy liberalism on the modern education system. It was for this reason that she had been accepted for the post of head at T——. In the past the Academy had enjoyed a reputation as a bastion of old fashioned values, but had embarked on a change of direction over the last two years with disastrous results. Two years ago the Academy had appointed a liberal headmistress who abolished caning. As a result standards had declined drastically. Discipline collapsed, along with academic standards, and pupils flouted uniform regulations with impunity. The result was an unhappy, disoriented academy, seeking firm leadership. The headmistress was dismissed, and the search was undertaken for a new traditional head. Miss Eagleton was appointed over the other candidates, precisely because of her reputation as a staunch advocate of corporal punishment. She impressed the governors as one who would not shrink from acting drastically to restore old disciplinary standards.

She made clear that she would not simply restore old standards, but establish an even stricter régime. The old headmistresses were willing to use the strap, but simply confined it to the mild hand-strappings applied in the privacy of the study. Only the headmistress had the right to use the strap, and no other instrument was to be used. Miss Eagleton made clear that her concept of corporal punishment was much more rigorous. She would introduce the cane. Punishments could be administered in public. Every mistress would possess a cane, and a special punishment



room was to be set up for the administration of extra severe canings. Four strokes became the absolute minimum of strokes that could be administered, and six became the recommended minimum. A standard maximum of twelve strokes was introduced, along with an absolute maximum of eighteen.

Miss Eagleton did not outline her new régime in detail to the Academy at the beginning of her first term. She simply announced that corporal punishment had been restored. She felt it best to let the girls find out by experience exactly what she meant. It was Angela's self-inflicted misfortune that she became the new régime's first example.

Angela was determined to seek revenge. She envisaged carrying out a particularly outrageous act of disobedience which would publicly humiliate the headmistress and make it impossible for her to carry on at the Academy. A loft was situated in the roof above Great Hall. The loft door was positioned directly over the point on the stage where the headmistress stood to conduct assembly. A rafter ran above the loft door in the loft itself. Angela's plan was to tie a bucket of water to the rafter, open the loft door, and let the bucket fall through, emptying its contents over Miss Eagleton in front of everyone. Angela planned to report sick to the sanatorium the day before the incident would occur. She would sneak out to the loft in assembly, and have time to sneak back again when the event happened, so that no one would think it was her. The result? One extremely wet headmistress, standing in front of six hundred smirking girls. The poor woman would probably burst into tears.

Angela went up to the loft armed with a bucket of water and some cord on Tuesday evening after dinner to set up her trap. Everything proceeded smoothly, and all was in place. "Oh feathers," she muttered as some water spilt onto her skirt. As she left the loft she bumped into the headmistress in the corridor and instinctively gave a guilty start. Miss Eagleton, her instincts honed by years of experience in dealing with naughty girls, was immediately suspicious.

"What were you doing in the loft, Angela? It is out of bounds, so who gave you permission to go there?" she rapped.

"Oh, no one, Miss Eagleton," stammered Angela. "I just wanted to see the view from the highest window in the Academy."

Miss Eagleton was not convinced by this feeble explanation. "Why have you got water on your skirt?" she demanded. Angela blushed. "We will both go up to see precisely what you have been up to," she said curtly. "Follow me."

With a sinking heart Angela followed Miss Eagleton up the stairs to the loft. Miss Eagleton's sharp eyes surveyed the loft. Angela stood behind her, this time feeling quite sick. It took her only a few seconds to spot the bucket of water. "I find it quite interesting, Angela, that you require a bucket of water to look out of the loft window. I find it even more interesting that you have to place the bucket on the loft door over Great Hall. I think your intentions are obvious. However we will now proceed to my study, where we will discuss this matter further."

The interview lasted one hour. At the end of the hour Miss Eagleton pronounced her judgement.

"Angela. You cannot reasonably expect to be treated leniently in view of the offence that you intended to commit. There can be no excuse for your conduct, and I have no hesitation in imposing a severe punishment in the hope that you will mend your ways and that the fear of punishment will teach you to respect the authority of your headmistress. Accordingly, you will tomorrow afternoon at three o'clock, be brought out in front of the entire Academy at a specially convened assembly in Great Hall and receive eighteen strokes with the heavy cane. I warn you that the punishment will be severe. You will report to your form-mistress Miss Heaney at two o'clock tomorrow. You may go."

Angela departed pale and shaking with fear as she contemplated the punishment that she would receive tomorrow. She slept badly and woke on Wednesday morning in a depressed state that stayed with her as she washed and dressed. She picked at her breakfast, oblivious to the conversation around her. At assembly all she could think about was the fact that she would be the cen-

tre of attention in the same place at three o'clock that afternoon. This feeling was intensified when the headmistress announced that all were to assemble in Great Hall at a quarter to three to witness a public caning. An excited buzz circulated around Great Hall at this news. This was the first public punishment in the Academy's history. Miss Eagleton had restored corporal punishment with a vengeance.

At half past two Angela knocked on the door of Miss Heaney's study. She entered. Miss Therese Heaney was calm and impassive. She felt that Angela deserved her punishment, but she was mindful of the fear the girl must be experiencing, and she felt that nothing would be gained if she were to adopt a judgmental approach towards the girl. She spoke to Angela in a quiet neutral tone.

"Angela. In a few minutes Miss Dubois will join us here in my study. At ten minutes to three all three of us will go and wait in the small room at the back of Great Hall. We will wait there until we are summoned just before three o'clock. At that time Miss Dubois and I will escort you into Great Hall, and we will walk down the aisle up on to the stage. Once there, you will be prepared for punishment. If you do as you are told the punishment will soon be over. You will be excused all lessons for the remainder of today and all of tomorrow." Miss Dubois duly joined them a few minutes later.

At a quarter to three all the pupils and staff had gathered in Great Hall. All were silent. An ominous atmosphere filled the hall. On the stage stood a table on which lay a crook-handled rattan cane, which was three feet four inches in length, and three-eighths of an inch in diameter. To the right of the table, in the centre of the stage was a gymnasium horse. At ten to three the headmistress and her deputy Miss Amelia Rush entered the hall. The headmistress stood in between the table and the horse, Miss Rush stood on the other side of the horse. Both looked resplendent in subfusc with their flowing black gowns and academic caps.

Miss Heaney stood at the open doorway of the little room at the back of Great Hall awaiting the signal from Miss Rush to

bring forth Angela. The girl sat miserable and listless, resigned to her destiny. The spirit of defiance which had welled up in her after her first caning had now completely disappeared. How she wished she had accepted that punishment with good grace. She now bore no ill-will towards the headmistress, she simply wanted the Head to be pleased with her.

Miss Eagleton gave a short address to those assembled on the topic of discipline. At five minutes to three she went and stood to the left of the horse, after picking up the cane from the table. She nodded to Miss Rush, who raised an arm to Miss Heaney at the back of the Hall.

"Come, Angela," said Miss Heaney softly. In a daze Angela rose from her seat and began the long walk to the stage. She was pale. Her wide eyes resembled those of a startled fawn, and she was biting her lower lip. In her fear she looked extremely pretty. One would not have thought that such a pretty girl could ever have done something to merit such a punishment. Miss Heaney and Miss Dubois stood on either side of the girl and escorted her slowly down the seemingly endless aisle towards the stage. The walk seemed to last for ever, but they finally mounted the steps to the stage. Angela's knees buckled slightly when she saw the horse and the cane lying on the table, but she was steadied by Miss Heaney and Miss Dubois. All three stood facing the horse. Angela looked straight ahead at the horse, breathing quickly.

"Remove your blazer," said Miss Heaney softly. She took Angela's blazer and laid it on the table next to the cane.

Angela stood, she was pale and she shook slightly. Miss Rush then said: "Bend over the horse. Let your arms hang over the other side." Angela obediently climbed on to the step in front of the horse and lifted her body over the soft leather top. Miss Heaney then raised Angela's skirt and petticoat over her back, so exposing her knickers. Miss Heaney and Miss Dubois went and stood in front of Angela on the other side of the horse. Miss Heaney took hold of Angela's left arm and Miss Dubois of Angela's right to hold her in place. Miss Rush fastened Angela's ankles down with ankle-straps which were attached to the horse. It was now one minute to three.

Miss Rush then looked at her watch and nodded to the headmistress, who lay the cane gently on the girl's bottom several times as she took aim. Every pupil watched intently, each one glad that she was not up on the stage. After laying the cane down gently five times, the headmistress nodded to Miss Rush and drew the cane as far back as possible. The Academy clock struck three. At the third chime Miss Eagleton let fly with as much force as she could muster. The cane flew through the air with a loud swish and thwack as it hit home. Angela gritted her teeth, and managed to remain silent. Miss Rush counted the stroke out aloud. Miss Eagleton impassively drew back the cane to administer the second stroke. Miss Rush looked at her watch, and when twenty seconds had elapsed, she nodded to Miss Eagleton, who administered the second stroke with maximum force. "Two," called out Miss Rush. Angela remained silent, although her face was now red. The punishment continued in the same way, with a stroke being administered every twenty seconds.

After the fourth stroke Angela began to cry out, but her evident distress did not persuade Miss Eagleton to moderate her punishment. She continued remorselessly, calmly administering the strokes with maximum force, deliberately aiming to ensure that the cane hit the lower half of the posterior. Miss Heaney, Miss Rush and Miss Dubois also remained dispassionate, feeling that the punishment was just and in Angela's best interests. The pupils continued to look on in silence, although there were some gasps at the severity of the caning. The atmosphere in Great Hall was subdued, as each pupil realised that she too could also be liable to receive such a punishment. All the mistresses looked on with approval, rejoicing in the new standards of discipline Miss Eagleton had brought to the Academy.

The final stroke was administered. "Eighteen," intoned Miss Rush. Angela had ceased to cry, she merely gasped as the final stroke landed. Although the thrashing had lasted only a little more than five minutes, it seemed like an eternity. She was conscious of an unbearable pain in her bottom, and the intensity of the caning meant that she forgot about the humiliation of being watched by a large audience. When the punishment ended she once again re-

membered that the seat of her knickers was on display to more than six hundred people, and she flushed with embarrassment, as her bottom throbbed agonisingly.

Miss Eagleton lay down the cane on the table. All those assembled were dismissed and the pupils filed out to return to their classes, as Angela remained bent over the horse, sobbing. When all the pupils had left, Angela was told to stand up. She stood there red-faced and heaving great sobs as Miss Eagleton, Miss Heaney, Miss Dubois and Miss Rush looked on. Miss Eagleton spoke softly to her.

“Your punishment is over, Angela, and you have taken it well. Let it be a lesson to you. You have the potential to be a credit to yourself and the Academy. You are an intelligent, personable girl with many fine qualities. I have caned you today in this way in order to uplift you morally so that you may realise your potential. You are excused lessons for the rest of today and tomorrow. You are now to go to the sanatorium to see Matron. Miss Heaney and Miss Rush will accompany you in case you have difficulty walking.’

After seeing Matron, Angela was then guided to one of the individual bedrooms in the sick bay where she was to spend the remainder of the day and the whole of the following day in order to allow her to regain her composure and reflect on her misdeeds and her punishment. She lay face down (she could hardly do anything else) and thought about the events of that day. She began to cry again as she thought about the shame of being caned in public. Her behind still throbbed with pain. She thought of Miss Eagleton’s calm strictness, the gentleness of all four of the mistresses involved in the administration of the punishment, and a feeling of loyalty to them and a desire to please them began to grow in her heart as she clutched her tear-stained pillow.

In her study Miss Eagleton also pondered on the day that had passed. She considered the caning she administered as one of her duties. It had been onerous, but nonetheless enjoyable. Her mind looked back to the fearsome but just canings she herself received not so many years ago. She was fond of her pupils and particular-

ly of the girl she had caned that day. She even admired Angela's daring in devising such a prank. She had longed to hug Angela after the caning, although of course she had refrained from doing so. The caning had crushed Angela, but this was not like the crushing of a piece of rubbish to be discarded. It was rather something positive, more akin to the crushing of grapes to create a fine wine or of rose petals to create a fragrant perfume. She would punish the girl again, of that she was sure, and in doing so, she would create a powerful bond of respect and affection that would far transcend the shallow egalitarianism of the modern world.

*Years of Grace*

by Miss Regina Snow





## Years of Grace

Miss Crawford ate like a bird in every sense of that rather hackneyed expression. Caroline Bates could not help thinking it every time she came to tea—which was perhaps two or three times a year. She sat perched on the edge of the armchair, nibbling at the corner of a sandwich with quick, tiny pecks. She was so thin that one felt she must starve herself, but there was no question of anorexia or excessive dieting. She simply could not make herself eat more than a dozen and a half tiny pecks at a sitting.

She was a strange contradiction of a woman: small, nervous, ineffectual—a spinster in the old sense; an unmarried woman with no career to speak of; yet she was clever enough and could have done many things had she put her mind to them, yet she lived rather as she ate—pecked at first one thing and then another, never finding sufficient appetite for any of them. By all worldly standards she was a failure, and yet she had that indefinable thing called *presence*—or was it just nervous energy? Whatever it was, this small, bird-like woman filled the room like an electric charge. One could not quite relax in her presence. She made one feel uncomfortable, and yet she had a certain fascination. She was never boring. Whatever the topic of conversation she had something arresting to say—often something unusual or even odd; but not odd in the tedious, self-centred manner of the ordinary neurotic; odd in a way that made one feel that there was a degree of profundity behind it.

“Of course modern science knows various things about the universe that were unknown to Hindoo or Mediæval astronomy. On the other hand their science contained a lot of things which ours lacks. The real question is which set of things is the more important. Of course modern people think their own kind of knowledge is more important, but then they are not impartial judges, are they? They are *interested parties*.”

Her talk, as always, became more impassioned as it became more abstract.

"But then," asked Mrs. Bates reasonably, "who is an impartial witness?"

"That is the whole problem," answered Miss Crawford, "in the proverbial nutshell. It is a problem, certainly, but I think not an insoluble one."

She was about to expand upon this when she was cut short by a resounding crash followed by a heavy thud. Miss Crawford seemed to jump nearly a foot into the air, although in truth the movement was confined to her shoulders, hands and expressive facial muscles.

"Goodness! What on *earth* was that?"

"Oh just Susan coming in from school—slamming the door and throwing her books down. I recognise that *crash*, *thud* almost as well as I know her voice."

"But can you not make her behave with a little more decorum?"

Caroline smiled at the strangely out-of-touch choice of words. It was easy to tell that Miss Crawford did not possess a television set. "I am afraid I have very little control over Susan," she said.

"Then you should—you should *spank* her."

Caroline smiled again at the notion of spanking her large, self-confident daughter. "I fear she is a little old for that."

Susan exploded into the room. She was eighteen and almost fully grown. Her hair was tousled in the fashionably unkempt style. Her school, unusually for these days, still insisted upon the maroon school uniform, but the collar of her school blouse was so open that a peep of her lace brassière could be seen at times, the knot of her necktie hung loose about her cleavage, her school skirt was six inches above the knee, revealing almost the entire length of her long adolescent legs as she sprawled into an arm-chair with the air of a girl exhausted by her day's exertions. Those legs were covered with heavy black nylon tights and ended, rather incongruously in a pair of greying canvas training shoes. Susan was not a bad girl for a product of her times, but she *was* a product of her times, and in Miss Crawford's eyes that made her a sorry parody of what a young lady of her age should be.

"Blimey!" exclaimed Susan. "You two have scoffed all the smoked salmon sandwiches."

"I was just telling your mother," said Miss Crawford, "that she ought to spank you. That outburst merely proves how correct I was."

"Spank me," said Susan, "I'd like to see her try," The statement was made in a humorous tone, but it was clear that she meant it.

Miss Crawford stared at Susan; positively stared. Her gaze was not hostile, but it was disconcertingly unwavering. Susan looked back, taking the full measure, perhaps for the first time, of Miss Crawford, whom she had known as a very occasional visitor since her earliest years. The difference between them could hardly have been more marked. Susan was rounded, and relaxed, her clothes were casual and sloppy. Miss Crawford was all straight lines and angles and her clothes were immaculate. One had hardly noticed them before—had just thought of them vaguely as 'conventional', but now she looked properly she noticed the elegance of her mid-grey coat and skirt, her carefully-toned lilac blouse, her expensive high-heeled grey shoes, her wonderfully sheer seamed stockings, the exquisite lilac gloves which she did not remove even to nibble at her sandwiches. She noticed the neatly-permed hair, and the carefully-painted lips and the curious aura of vitality that surrounded every movement she made. To a casual glance she might appear merely staid and middle-aged, but look at her again, in her own terms, and she was really surprisingly attractive.

At last Miss Crawford spoke. The silence had been curiously hypnotic, like that of a snake staring a rabbit down, and when Miss Crawford spoke she knew that she had a different and more receptive audience in Susan.

"Your mother thinks you are too old to be spanked, and I suppose she is right."

"Oh, do you really think so?" Her voice was heavy with sarcastic mock-disappointment, but behind it, they both knew, lay a real disappointment. She had expected something a little less tame from this electrical lady.

"I am afraid so. Spanking is for younger children. It *can* be employed to good effect upon a girl of your age, but not when she

is so hardened as you seem. Oh, I do not blame you, dear child. These modern schools. I would not send my worst enemy to one of them. A sound dose of the cane, or a good, heavy strap is what you really want."

Susan laughed nervously. "Every day before breakfast, I suppose."

"No," replied Miss Crawford, "not that frequently, but no less than once a month and probably rather more."

Mrs. Bates felt herself compelled to intervene. Unconsciously, perhaps she was aware of the hypnotic spell that had been woven between Miss Crawford and her daughter, despite the latter's surface flippancy. Unconsciously she sensed that spell as something dangerous which must be broken. Consciously she was a strong opponent of corporal punishment. Like most modern people, she had no opinions of her own and therefore clung the more fervently to the stock opinions fed to her by the mass-media.

"I always think that people who talk about strapping and caning so very easily can have no personal experience of what it is really like."

"On the contrary," said Miss Crawford, "my mother was a schoolmistress. I was a late child, and my mother belonged to a different generation from the parents of most of my contemporaries. Children were treated much more strictly when I was young, of course, but not nearly as strictly as they had been in my mother's day. When she was a young teacher, every schoolmistress kept a leather strap on her desk, and if a girl was not paying attention, or if her uniform was a little untidy—shall we say her tie was just slightly crooked or her shoes not polished to a shine—she would be called out to the front of the class for two or three strokes with that strap on her hands; and I can tell you that the first stroke stung so intensely that you would not believe you could bear another one, but the second and third strokes would be just as bad as the first. That was not what *strict* schoolmistresses did, just ordinary ones carrying out their duty. Charming young ladies, fresh from college, who would not dream of hurting an insect, plied that strap on half a dozen young palms every day of their working lives. The stricter mistresses gave their

strappings more easily and gave more strokes. Two or three on each hand instead of two or three altogether, and sometimes as many as eight. But these were not *serious* punishments, even though the girls worked very hard and kept their uniforms immaculate in order to avoid them. You should have seen the girls inspecting each other's cuffs and checking each other's stocking-seams before they went into a class held by one of the sterner mistresses. They didn't want to feel that strap! But as I have said, that was not a serious punishment.

"If you were told to stay behind after school was over, *then* you were in for a serious punishment. The mistress would lay you over a desk and lift up your skirts and give you a good, sound strapping. She often used a rather larger strap than the classroom one, and she usually used it on the bare thigh, between the top of the stocking and the—the underclothing. A dozen or eighteen strokes, sometimes more. Every one as hard as she could lay it on. You knew you'd been thrashed after that, I can tell you, and you didn't come back for a repeat performance in a hurry.

"But even that was not the most serious punishment. The worst thing of all was the cane. If you have ever had the traditional six of the best with a real school cane, you will know what I mean. Not one of those light canes you sometimes see these days, but a real, old-fashioned dark brown school cane—what we used to call a Victorian cane——"

Susan's eyes were growing as round as saucers and Mrs. Bates felt called upon to intervene: "Do you really believe treatment like that was good for girls?"

"I have not the smallest doubt of it," said Miss Crawford. "The serious punishments I have spoken of were rare enough, after all; but girls were neat, attractive, and generally contented. Their academic standards were two to three years ahead of today's equivalents. They appreciated good music and good literature. They were the beneficiaries of our ancient civilisation, while children of Susan's generation are just poor barbarians wandering aimlessly among the ruins of it."

"And all that because they were whipped and beaten," said Mrs. Bates tartly.

"Of course not, Caroline. But that was a *part* of it. Perhaps not an important part. Perhaps then we might even have managed without it—for a time at least. But if you ever want to recover what has been destroyed, if you ever want to make anything of this lost generation, I fancy you will not do it without discipline."

"But you have evaded my first point. You talk about your mother's days as a schoolmistress—but were *you* ever strapped or caned in that brutal way. I suspect you would not be so keen on it if you had been."

"Of course I was. Do you imagine my mother was such a hypocrite as to believe such treatment right for other people's children but not her own? She strapped me often and caned me when I needed it, which was usually a few times in a year. It was not brutal, but it was very severe."

"And that, I suppose, has made you what you are." This was a blow below the belt. Miss Crawford, as Caroline knew, had no illusions about her present position in life. There was a moment's silence in which she wished she could have recalled the words. She imagined Miss Crawford standing up and leaving her house without another word. Instead she smiled a little sadly and spoke with quiet dignity:

"If I am well-dressed and reasonably well-educated in the midst of a world which has no use for or understanding of either quality, then I think that may be attributed to my upbringing, certainly." She paused, and in taking breath seemed to sigh a little. "But what I am now—what I have become—that is almost entirely the result of living in a world which has ceased to have any value: a world where ugliness and vulgarity are worshiped and beauty is hated. A world in which I have been nothing and achieved nothing because there is nothing in that whole world that a sane person could be or could do."

"There may be some truth in what you say," said Caroline rather smugly, "but you can't turn your back on the real world, you know."

"What do you mean," asked Miss Crawford, "by the real world? You mean the world created by international money and its mass-media: a world which has turned *its* back on every crite-

tion of truth and value and beauty and judges everything by the coarsest and stupidest of standards. Why do you call it 'real'? Because it is big? Because it is rich? Because it has the money and the machinery to shape people's lives and mould their minds? Is that your criterion of reality? Well I not only *can* turn my back on it, I *have*. If a few more people had the courage to turn their backs on it we might have a world worth living in."

"I knew Miss Crawford was an old reactionary," said Mrs. Bates after she had left, "But *really*——"

"Ghastly," said Susan.

Miss Crawford turned the key in her latch and hung her neat, well-tailored coat upon the coat rack. She put the kettle on. She had taken more than enough tea at Mrs. Bates' house, but she did not smoke and rarely took alcohol, and she felt badly in need of something.

Mrs. Bates did not count, of course. Whoever owned the broadcasting networks owned Mrs. Bates's mind and all the countless millions like it. But the child—she had communicated with the child for a few minutes, she knew she had, and then it had slipped away. Turned into a silly, undignified wrangle with Mrs. Bates—or rather with the pre-packaged opinions of the broadcasting networks. But in any case, what could have come of it? Susan lived in that world. She had to. People did not allow themselves to be brainwashed simply because they were gullible, but also because they knew they had no alternative but to live in that world anyway. The lie was less painful if you could allow yourself to believe it. Oh well, what did it matter? She turned, as she often did on such occasions, to Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, and then to Jane Austen, and then to Mozart.

She had succeeded in putting the matter almost completely out of her mind by the time Susan came. That was three days later. When the knock came at the door, Miss Crawford had no idea who it might be. Her visitors were few and came always at pre-arranged times.

"Good afternoon, Miss Crawford," said Susan.

"Good afternoon, Susan. How can I help you?"

"I—I just wanted to talk to you."

"Really? Well, do come in." She ushered Susan into her little sitting room. She noticed that the child sat upright and tried not to sprawl. Her tie was done up properly, but her skirt was still absurdly short, and her hair, though brushed, shapeless and directionless.

"Will you take tea?" asked Miss Crawford. Susan half-wanted to refuse. She wanted to get on with the matter in hand quickly while she still felt able, but Miss Crawford's question was not really a question at all. Tea was more or less obligatory. It was part of the ritual of having a visitor.

"Thank you, that would be nice."

Susan looked about the neat little room with its bound volumes of the classics and 1930s detective stories—not one of them in a garish modern paperback edition, and few of them having cost half as much as such an edition. In contrast to Miss Crawford's habitual nervousness, the room seemed cool and restful and ordered. The curtains were drawn as if to shut out the world beyond. Everything seemed to fit. When her mother's other friends had fine old things in their rooms they took especial care to have bare plank bookshelves, or unframed block-mounted pictures or cork notice-boards and various other elements of incongruous modernity, just to prove that they were eclectic and unpredictable—or, in other words, exactly the same as every one else. This room was different. It was timeless, it was real.

Miss Crawford returned with the tea tray, bearing a delightful china teapot and beautiful gold-edged cups, saucers and plates with pink roses on them. A few days ago, Susan would have considered them hopelessly suburban and old-fashioned. Today she could see the real beauty in their design. At the same time, she suddenly realised, by a sort of intuitive sympathy, that Miss Crawford was not naïvely blind to their suburbanism: that that, to her, was a curious part of their charm, and that her appreciation of them was rather more sophisticated than the casual observer might suppose.

"Now, how can I help you, Susan?" asked Miss Crawford.

Susan struggled vainly to think of a way of leading up to it and



then closed her eyes and plunged straight in. "Did you mean it when you said the other day that I ought to be punished?"

"Of course I meant it, dear child. I never say anything I do not mean."

"I thought you wouldn't. Well, I agree with you."

"Then you are a great deal more sensible than you look."

A silence ensued in which Miss Crawford took several bird-like sips from her teacup. Susan did not know quite what to say. Finally she said:

"Well, I'm ready."

"Ready for what, my dear?" asked Miss Crawford.

"I don't know: a spanking or the strap or the cane, or whatever it is I must have."

Miss Crawford smiled. "I see. Well, my dear, I am rather charmed. But, you see, it is really not quite as simple as you seem to think."

"Why not?" asked Susan.

"There are a number of problems. Not insuperable problems, perhaps, but problems nonetheless which must be carefully considered."

"What do you mean? What problems?"

"Well, to begin with there is the problem of how it is to be done. I have already stated my opinion that a spanking would not be the correct punishment for you. So what could I do? You speak of the strap or the cane, but those are specialised implements made by craftsmen for their particular purpose. What makes you think I have such implements to hand?"

"I could bring a garden cane. I know where to buy them. They are made of bamboo aren't they?"

"Indeed they are, and bamboo is quite the wrong material for the purpose. Stiff, unbending stuff. Quite useless. One cannot cane a girl with a garden cane. We should need a good rattan cane with a crook handle, straight as a poker, yet so flexible I could bend it into a half-circle."

Susan's face was flushed. "Would that hurt me terribly?"

"Terribly. But where do you propose to get such an implement?"

"I don't know. I could get a heavy leather belt."

"Certainly not. I do not propose to thrash you with a belt like some coarse factory hand beating his son."

"Well, then, *can't* you spank me? I have a hairbrush at home; a flat wooden one. It hurts like anything—I've tried it against my thigh and I can't make myself use it with anything like full strength, it is just too painful, but you could take me over your knee and really lay it into me."

"I have already indicated that I do not intend to spank you."

"But why not?"

"Because I say so," said Miss Crawford primly.

Susan's face was a mask of frustrated annoyance. No one had ever thwarted her will so arbitrarily before. If adults did not do her bidding they at least gave her good reasons for it.

Another silence ensued, broken this time by Miss Crawford.

"In point of fact, these practical difficulties are not essential. No doubt they can be circumvented if I wish them to be. But there are other problems. More fundamental ones. Let us begin by considering them. Why do you wish to be chastised?"

"Because when you said I needed to be I could see you were right."

"What do you mean by that? Are you sorry for your slovenly behaviour and your impudence toward your mother?"

"Yes—I suppose so."

"Of course you aren't. Neither are you sorry for your appalling dress, otherwise you would not have come here looking like that."

Susan was affronted: "I *have* made an *effort*," she said. "I am much tidier than I usually am."

"Which is not saying a great deal, is it? What do you think would have happened if you had presented yourself at one of my mother's classes dressed like that?"

"But that isn't *fair*——"

"Isn't it? I think you could have made a much better effort. It might have cost you some trouble and perhaps a little money, but you certainly could have presented yourself as some semblance of a human being if you had *really* wished to. Instead of

that you did up your collar, straightened your tie, did a quick lick-and-polish and imagined that would be good enough for me. It is *not* good enough for me. It is nowhere *near* good enough for me."

Susan's temper was beginning to fray. "You're not being reasonable. You're asking the impossible."

"You are a very resourceful young lady, Susan. You usually contrive to get what you want. If you had wanted to come here looking like a real girl instead of a bedraggled chimpanzee you would have done it; and if you ever wish to come here again you *will* do it. But that brings us to another matter. *Do you accept my authority?* Do you take my word as law? Because the way you have just been talking to me does not lead me to think so. Now why would I punish a girl who does not accept my authority? Would not that be a pointless charade?"

Take her word as law! The word of this queer, bird-like middle-aged lady who says "because I say so" to justify her arbitrary decisions. The thought was strange, and yet it was also fascinating.

"I have not been accepting your authority so far," she confessed.

"I am aware of that. Do you wish to do so?"

"I—I think so."

Suddenly Miss Crawford's voice softened. The probing, challenging note died away. "Take your time, my child. Why should you accept my authority? Why should you wish me to punish you? I have asked you before, but let us try again, more carefully this time. Why did you come here?"

"When you said I needed to be punished, I knew that you were right. You have shown me that my attitudes were all wrong—and I *should* have tried harder with my clothes; but still, what I said at first *was* true. I knew I needed to be punished as soon as you said it."

"Punished for what?"

The question took her by surprise. "Well—well, what did *you* think I should be punished for?"

"I am well aware of what *I* think you should be punished for, both the immediate occasions and the more fundamental reasons.

What interests me at present is what *you* think you should be punished for."

"I don't know," she said rather helplessly. "I just feel it would do me good—would *clean* me somehow."

"Do you feel unclean?"

"Yes, I do. As if I had been in a hot, sticky place for years, I feel dull and sluggish. I feel as if there must be more to life than what they teach at school and show on the television."

"You really are more sensible than you look, child. Yes, there is more to life, and I fancy I could show you a little of it. As you suggest, it would be necessary to *clean* you, and punishment would certainly be a part of the process: but you must not imagine that punishment is a magical formula. You must do much of the work of cleansing for yourself. Do you think you are ready for that?"

"I am not *certain* what you mean, but I think I am."

"Good. Well, in that case, I think we may begin to deal with you. Get up and stand in that corner with your face to the wall."

Susan obeyed instantly—at once shocked and delighted by the sudden change in her relation to her hostess. She heard the door open and close, and guessed that Miss Crawford had left the room. It was a strange and unnerving feeling, standing in this absurd and subservient position, waiting for Miss Crawford to return. It was also thrilling. The discipline had begun. Miss Crawford had agreed. What was going to happen next? Was she about to be thrashed? She hoped so. She was a *shade* nervous. Her tummy felt heavy with anticipation: but more than anything she was excited. She *knew* that she needed to be thrashed. She hungered for it more than she could ever remember hungering for anything. Miss Crawford was gone for some while. Susan felt restive. She was not accustomed to waiting; not accustomed to standing still without entertainment for any length of time. Finally she heard her hostess re-enter the room, but for some minutes she addressed no word to Susan. She seemed to be arranging something in the unhurried fashion of staid, middle-aged people. Eventually she said sharply.

"About face!" Susan turned sharply in response to the military-style command.

"Well, Susan," said her hostess, "I have had some small success. After a certain amount of rummaging among cases that have not been opened these fifteen years, I have discovered this." She held out to her young guest's gaze a leather strap, some eighteen inches in length, quite broad and divided for the last six inches into three distinct tails. It looked old and somehow solid and venerable. The leather was dark, well oiled and had the *patina* of long and regular use. There was nothing in any way ostentatious about this strap. It was a simple, businesslike implement designed solely for the infliction of painful correction upon the young. If there was a ritual about its use it was a ritual sanctified merely by its continual repetition, hour after hour, day after day—unspectacular punishment which meant nothing much to any one except the girl who was receiving it at the moment and to her meant so much more than its unspectacular nature could possibly indicate. It was not intended to be *interesting*, this strap. It was dull and yet dreadful. All this Susan could somehow read into that complacently expressive length of burnished leather, partly from what Miss Crawford had said before, partly by the quietly eloquent way in which she handled it and partly—strange though it may seem—from the very look and essence of the strap itself.

Yet despite its prosaic nature, Susan was thrilled and fascinated by the strap. It came from a world of discipline whose most prosaic moments were exotic to her.

"Yes," said Miss Crawford, following her gaze to the implement in her hand. "You will be feeling this in a little while, and you may not find it as pleasant as you hope. But for the moment," she laid aside the strap and picked up a book that she had placed on the table beside her chair, "I wish you to consider this. It is a book which tells you all about how a young lady should dress and behave herself. I wish you to study it and act upon it when you leave here. I shall not give you specific directions as I might to another girl in your position. I feel that you are a girl of great determination and initiative. I wish you to use those qualities in the cause of reforming yourself. When you see me again, it will be your success or otherwise in doing so that will determine whether you are to receive the discipline you desire."

A stab of disappointment entered Susan's heart. Was the strap not to be used after all. Miss Crawford had said that she would be feeling it "in a little while" but had she meant days rather than minutes? She felt like a desert traveller who finds that the water she had been about to drink is only a mirage. She continually surprised herself by the urgency of her desire for this unpleasant experience.

"One more thing," said Miss Crawford. Susan's heart revived. "I wish you, before we meet again, to make sure that you see at least two films made before the year 1960. I wish you to observe the women and girls in those films—how they dress, how they move, how they speak. I wish you to learn from them and be ready to answer questions on the subject."

There was an air of finality about this last statement; a definite cadence which indicated that the interview was at an end. Miss Crawford rose as if to show her guest out.

"When shall I come again?" asked Susan.

"Shall we say at the same time a week from today—and I shall expect you to be punctual."

A week! The disappointment was almost insupportable. Nevertheless, Susan did not try to press her claim to immediate discipline. Something told her that such an action would only excite Miss Crawford's perversity to create further delay or even to refuse altogether to discipline her. With a heavy heart she turned to go.

"One moment," said her hostess. "I do not recall dismissing you."

"I'm sorry," said Susan meekly.

"I'm sorry, *miss*," corrected Miss Crawford. "From now on you will call me 'miss' every time you speak to me, do you understand, child?"

"Yes, *miss*."

"Good, now I regret to say that before I can allow you to leave there is a small matter that must be attended to." Miss Crawford picked up the strap and turned it over lovingly in her hand. This technique of letting a girl almost leave before recalling her for her punishment was one she had learned from her mother. The class was dismissed and only at the last moment were one or two

miscreants ordered to remain behind. She knew that the effect upon Susan was rather different from that upon those girls of years ago, but she also felt that in another way it would serve something of the same purpose.

She felt the weight of the strap, letting it fall firmly, under its own weight, against the palm of her left hand. Even this forceless blow carried a hint of the fearsome sting which she remembered from the days of her youth. She wondered how it would feel to a spoilt, sloppy brat who had never had a good smack in her entire life. It would shock her, that was certain—and do her good. She rather doubted whether the girl would really come back after this; but really, it hardly mattered. At least she would have one dose of what all these wretched little slobs so badly needed. She checked her thoughts. After all, it was hardly their fault. They were simply what a corrupt and degenerate society had made them. Had they been born in better times they would have been charming, pretty, well-mannered little things—and God knows they had little enough happiness from all their sloppy ‘freedom’. They were dull and discontented. Their lives were empty and they knew it. Still the girl wanted to be punished, and it would do her good, if only temporarily.

Miss Crawford slapped the instrument across her palm again, a little more firmly this time. A tiny foretaste taste of its pain tingled through her skin. They certainly knew how to design an effective strap in those days. She felt the power the implement conveyed. She assumed her mother’s air of absolute authority.

“Now, Susan, if I were to give you what you deserve for the way you are dressed at this moment, you would not sit down for a week; but I understand that your appearance is only partly your fault. You are immediately responsible for it, it is true, but you have been subjected to poisonous influences which you have never been taught how to resist or criticise. Up till now you have been more a puppet than a free agent. I am therefore not going to punish you for your actual appearance, but will discipline you as if you had been guilty merely of some small fault, some accidental lapse of neatness. Take one step forward, Susan.”

“Yes, miss,”

"You will receive two strokes of the strap on each hand. Hold out your right hand."

Susan's whole heart cried out against the lenity of the punishment. She wanted to be put over a chair and thrashed. She did not want a punishment on the hands, and if she must have one she wanted something severer than this, which must surely be about the lightest punishment she could have been awarded. Bitterly disappointed, she extended her hand, palm upwards in the time-honoured fashion.

Miss Crawford judged her aim. She had used a strap on a few occasions before and knew how to do it. This was not one of the heavier Scottish straps, of which four strokes on the hands would have been indescribable agony. It would certainly leave no marks beyond a general reddening that would pass quite quickly. It was a standard English classroom strap. Simple, businesslike and effective. For a child unaccustomed to discipline, she judged it would be sufficient. She raised the implement, letting it fall back over her shoulder; paused, judging her aim, and then brought it down in a great arc. It connected forcibly with the unprotected palm, issuing a crack like a pistol-shot. Susan drew back her hand in shock. She had never believed anything could hurt her so much. Her face was flushed and tears sprang involuntarily to her eyes. Her hand was throbbing terribly.

Miss Crawford gave her a bare few seconds to recover herself and then ordered: "Right hand down, left hand out."

Susan turned her moist, adolescent eyes upon her. "I can't, Miss Crawford—I just *can't*."

Miss Crawford seemed completely unconcerned. "Very well, then, you are free to go."

It was perfectly clear that if she left now there could be no returning.

"I am very sorry, miss," said Susan and bravely presented her left hand.

"I should think you were sorry," said Miss Crawford. "Ordinarily you would have several more strokes for that act of rebellion; however, on this occasion and on this occasion only I shall overlook it."



She placed the strap over her shoulder and gauged the stroke unhurriedly before bringing it down on the other palm. Susan gasped but managed to keep her hand in place. She was really very brave considering all her disadvantages.

"Good girl," said Miss Crawford approvingly. "Left hand down, right hand out.

This was Susan's greatest test yet. Her right hand was still throbbing mercilessly. How could she bear to present it for another stroke of that terrible strap? Well, those girls did, all those years ago. They had no choice. She wanted to be like them. She would give herself no choice. She opened her poor, reddened palm and presented it again. Miss Crawford was half tempted to reduce the force of this stroke just a little, but that would be a betrayal both of herself and the child. She swung the strap with all her force across the inflamed hand. Susan yelled aloud, unable to restrain herself.

"Silence, child," commanded Miss Crawford. "Right hand down, left hand out."

The ordeal had become almost too much for Susan. She was damp with perspiration and her whole being was conscious of nothing but the pain in her hands. She was still free to leave, but she was determined to endure this last stroke. Neatly and without hesitation she extended her left hand again. Miss Crawford, quite disappointed that the punishment was over so soon, yet knowing that her judgement in awarding a moderate one had been correct, determined to put her all into this last stroke. She brought down the strap with consummate skill and force. The pain shot through Susan's whole being. Despite her resolution to keep the hand in place she clutched it to her breast, gasping on the verge of tears.

"What a childish exhibition," said Miss Crawford severely, but as she opened the door for her guest, there was a glimmer of warmth in her eyes. The child had passed her first test. There was potential in her.

As she turned to put on Haydn's Clock Symphony, she wondered whether she should have shared the first movement with Susan—given her a few minutes to recover herself before leaving

the sanctum. No—let her carry the first shock out into her own world. Let her see the contrast. If she returned there would be time for all that—times when she would need it far more than she did now. And if she did not, then better not to let her approach the heart of things.

Susan made her way dazedly across the small town to her home. So much had happened since she had made the journey the other way less than an hour ago—so much less than she had been expecting, and so much more. Already the pain in her hands was dying away. She looked at them. They were still red, but much less so. Soon they would be back to normal. Already she could see that the punishment really *had* been quite a small one. So small and yet so terrible. She was discovering one of the secrets of real punishment. Imagine living in fear of that every hour of the day! Imagine its being an inconsiderable incident which no one would even remark upon! Ten minutes ago, at the height of it, the thought would have been intolerable. Now, once again, it was rather fascinating. As the pain subsided, she felt a curious calm that she had never felt before—a radiant calm of commingled peace and elation. She saw a group of youngsters of her own age clad in fluorescent patches and baseball caps. Already she felt superior to them. Already she felt herself part of a different world; a finer, purer, more fiery world.

Susan lay on her bed reading the book Miss Crawford had given her. It was called *The Years of Grace*, published in 1950. It was by no means a strict book—it was light and friendly, but took it for granted that girls would accept advice and instruction from adults without the said adults speaking through the mask of a bogus and manipulative “youth culture”. It took it for granted that there were standards in the world other than those laid down by big business and advertising men. It told girls how to wear the right clothes, be neat and graceful, how to speak correctly, appreciate music, play tennis and a hundred other things. It suggested a world to Susan that was very different from any she had known. A world that was sane and attractive, neat and good. The Years of Grace of the title referred to the years between the ages of twelve

and twenty—what later became called teenage years—years, the authoress said, when a girl might be at her most charming. With a sudden pang Susan realised that her years of grace were more than three-quarters gone without a single ray of grace having touched them at any point. She felt guilty for not having been more graceful, but more intensely, she felt angry at a world which had stifled her natural grace, which had given her no models of gracefulness, and which would not appreciate or understand or reciprocate any grace which she might now, belatedly, acquire.

The book fascinated her. Was this, too, something of what she had been missing? Was this part of what she went to Miss Crawford to find? She dutifully watched her two films, and found that she was seeing them through new eyes. She had seen 'old films' before, of course, but had seen them as she was expected to see them—as period pieces to be judged by the standards (or rather anti-standards) of today. Now she suddenly realised that they might be seen in the opposite way—as representing standards in themselves against which today might be judged. It was a fascinating revelation. Miss Crawford had said very little to set her mind on this track, but once one began to realise that there was another way of looking at things, the whole world suddenly stood on its head; or perhaps Susan was seeing for the first time that it had been standing on its head all her life.

For her next visit to Miss Crawford, Susan dressed herself as neatly as possible: the smart coat and skirt she had worn for her Saturday job—the skirt was nearly knee-length—sheer, skin-coloured tights and high-heeled shoes. Her hair she brushed and brushed until it fell shiny and soft about her shoulders with no hint of untidiness. A touch of lipstick made her look smarter and prettier without being precocious. This time she felt sure Miss Crawford would approve.

Miss Crawford looked at her doubtfully. She had obviously tried. Her overall appearance was not bad, though it left quite a lot to be desired from her point of view. They took tea and Miss Crawford asked for Susan's thoughts on the book and on the films she had watched. All the time, that sober, polished strap was resting on the sideboard, awaiting its moment. Miss Crawford was

pleased at her level of understanding. Susan was an apt pupil. Her natural appreciation of the rightness of things was very near the surface once it had been released—which showed how little one could tell by seeing a girl in her puppet-state.

“And do you still feel you need to be punished?” asked Miss Crawford.

“Oh, yes, miss” said Susan. “I know it now more than ever.”

“Good, then I think we may proceed to a good, old-fashioned strapping. Follow me.”

Miss Crawford stood up and took her strap. She led the way from the little sitting room into her small dining room, which was dominated by an oak dining table which had belonged to her family in more spacious days. It was the very dining table over which she had suffered so many whippings from her mother and it seemed quite delightful to think of a youthful form once again bent over its highly-polished oaken surface. Miss Crawford positioned the girl exactly where she wanted her to stand.

“Now bend over,” she said, “and lay the upper part of your body flat on the table. That is correct. Stretch out your arms and take hold of the far edge of the table. Good. Now do not let go until I tell you to rise.”

Susan felt her ribs and her young breasts compressed against the old, unyielding wood, and she felt secure and supported. She was nervous now, no longer underestimating the power of the strap to hurt her. With a part of her mind she felt herself insane to expose herself to this terrible punishment, but with the greater part of herself, with the very core of her being, she knew that this was what she had longed for. The strapping on her hands had helped her somewhat, but she knew that what she really needed was not to be beaten at her extremities but to feel the sting of discipline reverberate through her body—strike firmly against those parts ordained by nature to be whipped. There was something cold and impersonal about a punishment on the hands—something at once intolerable and brusque, when what she knew she needed was an intimacy of discipline—not an intimacy with a person exactly, but an intimacy with discipline itself; a burning, flooding intimacy with wholesome and comely severity which would clear her soul

and free it from the sticky, saccharine corruption of the shapeless, edgeless, graceless world in which she had so far passed her days.

Miss Crawford pulled up her rather tight skirt with a firmness that overcame by its force and determination the potential awkwardness of the operation. Susan felt her thighs exposed and felt at once a moisture of fear upon her brow and another moisture upon her tongue, of anticipation, almost of appetite. She was to be thrashed at last, and she literally ached for it.

There was a delay before the first stroke fell, a worrying silence which was finally broken by Miss Crawford's voice.

"My child, I cannot approve of your underclothing. A lady does not wear nylons of the sort you are wearing. Stockings are the only correct and permissible form of hose. From the way you were sitting in that skirt I had already gathered that you were dressed in this way, and I was prepared to overlook it on this occasion only. But there is something else. Something that shocks me yet more deeply. You are wearing a skirt without any form of slip or petticoat. Surely any girl must know how vulgar that is, and if by chance the world you live in is so degenerate that it has been wholly forgotten, the book you have been studying must surely have taught you something. But worst of all are your—your knickers child. They are the most revolting shade of purple, and they do not cover—well *anything* to speak of. Stand up child,"

Susan stood up, awkwardly wiggling her skirt back into a decent position. She could hardly believe that her whipping was not to be, but clearly it was not. Miss Crawford spoke again:

"I cannot give a serious punishment to a girl who is still so wholly outside the order of things. I shall punish you for your irregularities of dress, but I shall punish them as minor irregularities, for that is what you must regard them to be, if, indeed, you regard them as irregularities at all, else you had not come to me in this fashion. You will receive three strokes on each hand, and you may report to me at the same time next week. And I warn you, Susan, that will be your last chance. Right hand out."

The thought of a more severe version of last week's cold chastisement was almost more than she could bear. Could she really

take three strokes of that strap on each hand. She resigned herself miserably. She had to. She had as little choice as those girls of old—or rather, what choice she had was absolutely denied by the imperative of her inner being. She found, curiously, in this sense of compulsion and powerlessness a certain solace, a certain warm inner flooding that took away a little of the coldness of the punishment—gave it a psychological warmth to counter its physical coldness. Somehow she endured those cruel, resounding strokes, presenting her hands stoically, one after the other for the implacable attentions of Miss Crawford's strap. She left the house scarcely able to feel the two books she was carrying for the tingling, throbbing numbness of her hands. There had been nothing grand or dramatic about her punishment. She felt like a stupid, chastised child in a world where the chastisement of children was a thing too commonplace to remark upon; and somehow that feeling brought her a curious inner glow of charming melancholy, and made that other world, the world through which she walked, where chastisement was by no means commonplace except in the mean and sneaking modes of mockery and manipulation—it made that world seem further away than it had ever seemed before.

Miss Crawford took out a record she did not often play—the *Liebestod* from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. She let the music roll over her in long, undulating waves. Last time Susan had come she had been an unknown quantity. Now she felt that she knew her. Either she would not come back—but that was unlikely—or she would make the greatest effort to transform herself. Susan did not like to fail at things, and she must understand by now something of what she should be aiming for. If Miss Crawford knew her young pupil—and she flattered herself she did—the next visit would be from a new and fascinating Susan—a Susan worthy to prostrate herself before the strap; worthy to sob and writhe beneath the first real thrashing of her life.

The first, but by no means the last.

Miss Crawford had guessed correctly. Susan decided to transform herself. The rejection of her previous attempt had cut her deeply.

She expected to do well in anything she seriously attempted. She had tried and she had failed, but now she realised that she had not tried nearly hard enough. Her standards had been far too low. She had imagined that a reasonably neat and conservative form of the late 20th century style of dress would be adequate to the situation. Indeed, she would have been afraid to dress in clothes that might be regarded as 'period' or as inappropriate to an ordinary girl of her generation, lest such a thing be seen as 'going too far'. Now she realised that Miss Crawford favoured no such moderation, and Susan felt a subtle thrill which gradually increased as she considered the matter.

Dressing neatly, behaving with decorum; such ideas had always been associated in her mind with colourless conformity. She had assumed that that was what Miss Crawford must have wanted of her. Anything more flamboyant might have been regarded as wilfulness on her part. Now it struck her, suddenly and delightfully, that decorum and modesty were anything but conventional. They were nothing short of a revolution against the whole world in which she had been brought up. More than that, they were the only form of rebellion possible. To wear torn-off jeans or dye one's hair purple or shave one's head and tattoo it with obscene words was not rebellious: it was the very height of suburban conformity. To do such things was to do precisely what the system was telling one to do. If anything, it was a shade more conventional than the secretarial style she had affected on her last visit to Miss Crawford, though really there was little to choose between the two styles for sheer slavish triteness.

On the other hand, to affect a real decorum of style—to be beautiful and fresh and charming, to be like the girls in *The Years of Grace*—that would be true rebellion. That would be to hoist the banner of revolution and to declare war to the death on the whole smug scrofulousness of the rotten world about her. A light came into Susan's eye. So Miss Crawford wanted her to go beyond the bounds of the late 20th century. Very well, she would go beyond those bounds—far beyond them.

The next day was Saturday, and Susan was out all day, searching through charity shops and department stores for the clothes

she wanted. She returned home in the late afternoon, tired but triumphant. Her most spectacular find was a circular 1950s skirt together with a three-layered stiff net petticoat that would hold it out in a wide flare. The skirt needed a little alteration before it would fit her and she set to work right away.

After dinner she was ready to try on her new ensemble. She had a bath and made herself up with ruby red lips that looked utterly 1950s and applied a delicate but clinging scent which seemed to her right for the effect she was trying to create. She put on her stockings carefully. It was the first time in her life that she had fastened suspenders and it took her a little time to work out how to do it. She had found real, fully-fashioned stockings in one of the charity shops, still in their unopened 1950s wrapper. Immediately she had realised that none of the hosiery available in the smartest department stores was anything like this—or anywhere near as good. She delighted in the crisp, stretchless feeling of them, the almost hard film that they made over her legs, and the tiny wrinkles at her ankles and behind her knees. They were a little long (she realised only now, that being unstretchy they could not be all one size), but she found that by fastening the suspender some way down the dark welts, she could get them taut, and was quite pleased with the ‘swagged’ effect produced by suspending them in this way. If possible she would find a pair in her exact size before her visit, but if not these would look well, she thought. Her legs, swathed in the tensely-sheening mid-tan film, had never looked so glamorous. Indeed, glamour had never been a word she could associate with herself at all until this moment.

Then she came to the gorgeous, stiff, rustling petticoats. As she made herself ready, she had a curious, embarrassed sensation. She was nervous in case her mother should come in and see her; but more than that there was a sense of strange vulnerability and of the breaking of a taboo. She felt like—what was it that she felt like? She struggled to identify the curious feeling she had, and then it came to her. She felt like a transvestite. Here she was, in the privacy of her room, surreptitiously dressing up as a female. She had never dressed as a female before. The idea seemed strange—even absurd; but it was true. She had never dressed up as a girl before.



What had she dressed as? Not as a boy, not really. Sometimes she had dressed boyishly in jeans and tee-shirts, but more often she wore short skirts and clothes that were nominally female. But they were not really feminine. Not like what she was putting on now. They were neuter. And it was not just the clothes. Almost everything about most girls and women in the late 20th century was neuter—the way they talked, the vocabulary they chose, the gestures they made, the way they walked and moved—none of them were specifically feminine as they had been throughout human history. They were neutered—and what Susan was doing now was cross-dressing from neuter to feminine. It was a strange, powerful, almost erotic experience. It had to do with more than simply a change of clothes. It was a change of the whole orientation of her *persona*. She felt the change in her body, in her most intimate parts; they felt unspeakably sensitive, soft and warm and delicate, and at the same time almost raw with vulnerability. The calloused, protective shell of neutrality had been removed from her and she felt like pure, unprotected femininity. It was almost like being stripped of a layer of skin, and finding underneath something unbearably tender. Something beautiful and pure and lovely, but almost too refined and sensitive for the harsh, corrosive, cutting atmosphere of the late 20th century.

She was afraid when she knocked on Miss Crawford's door. She had been afraid each time, but this time the fear was different. On the first occasion she had felt the natural sick dread of asking something very strange of some one who was nearly a stranger to her. Both the previous times she had felt afraid of not getting what she wanted, and almost equally afraid of *getting* what she wanted—and each time she felt that in a way both fears had come true. And each time she had possessed a kind of confidence alongside her fear. The confidence of a bouncy modern girl who knew what she was doing and was accustomed to getting her own way.

Today it all felt different. Her foremost fear concerned whether Miss Crawford would accept her as she now appeared. She had done well. She had done her very best. If Miss Crawford did not like her present effort she was not sure what more she could do.

Not that it would arise, because Miss Crawford had said that this was her last chance, and Miss Crawford was a woman of her word.

Before she had wanted Miss Crawford to accept her—to do what *she*, Susan, wanted. Today it was different. Today it mattered what Miss Crawford thought of her in quite a different way. Miss Crawford was the only person in the world—or at any rate in Susan's world—capable of judging her. Of judging what she had become. She had confidence too. Not the supercilious confidence she had possessed before—the confidence of the puppet knowing she was doing the bidding of her electronic master and that she had the money-power firmly behind her pseudo-rebellion. No, her confidence now lay in knowing that she had thrown off the brainwashing—that she was real while everything about her was false. But only Miss Crawford could judge whether she had really succeeded.

Her petticoats rustled and brushed deliciously against the taut nylon of her legs. She was either a wonderful new creation or a failure, and in another moment she would know which.

The door opened. Miss Crawford smiled slightly and ushered her in.

"Susan, my dear, will you take tea?"

"That would be very nice, miss."

"Good. The kettle is on. I shall just make it."

"Miss Crawford——"

"Yes, Susan?"

"Miss Crawford, I know I should just wait for you to tell me, but I can't wait. Miss Crawford, how do I look? Have I succeeded?"

"There wouldn't be a lot of point giving you tea if you hadn't succeeded, though I suppose one should still have done one's duty as a hostess." She left the room. Susan felt strangely hollow as she waited for Miss Crawford to return.

The hostess came in with the tea-tray and poured tea. She sat back in her chair and looked at Susan. She did not often sit back in company. She was normally perched on the edge of her chair. Susan noticed the change, but was not certain what to make of it. There was silence. There were often silences with Miss

Crawford. Strange, rich silences—tense, yet more profound than the words of others. At last she spoke.

"I am not a demonstrative person, Susan," she said. "You asked me if you had succeeded and I feel my answer—whatever it should be—meant a lot to you. Did it?"

"Susan cast her eyes down. "Yes, it did, miss."

"My answer meant a lot to you. It is important that it meant a lot to you. And it was not adequate, was it? My answer, I mean. Not adequate?"

"I—I don't know what to say, miss."

"Quite right, Susan. It is not your place to criticise me. But it is my place. My answer was not adequate. I flatter myself I have a way with words, Susan. But when my words were actually wanted—perhaps the first time in a decade they were actually wanted, and very possibly the last—I failed. I failed myself and I failed you. I grunted like a silly old woman.

"Well, I am not a silly old woman, Susan, and here is my answer. You have succeeded. You have succeeded far better than I had hoped you would. And my hopes were not low, because I know you are not a fool, Susan.

"But I wasn't expecting this. I wasn't expecting a transformation inside as well as outside. I can tell, you know. I can tell what has happened. Perhaps you don't know it yet yourself. Do you?"

"I'm not sure, miss."

"Well, what do you know?"

"I know there's no going back. I know I can never again be one of them."

"And what are we to do with you, Susan? There's nothing much else to be."

"No. I suppose not. But I'd rather be real and empty than full of—of trash."

"Don't say 'trash' Susan."

"I'm sorry, miss. I couldn't think of a better word."

"It is very expressive. And very true. Nevertheless——"

"Of course."

"'Poison' would have been much better. Stronger, not slangy and more accurate, too."

"The word didn't occur to me, miss."

"People often think that it is a good idea to resort to slang when they want to be forceful. In point of fact, good English well deployed is always more powerful."

"I am sure it is, miss. I hope you will teach me about good English, and—and about *all* the things I should have learned and haven't."

"I should like to."

"Because, miss, when you said it might be the last time your words were wanted, you were quite wrong if you don't mind me saying so. *I* will want them, always."

"Shall, Susan."

"Pardon?"

"I *shall* want them always'. and 'if you don't mind *my* saying so'."

"There is such a lot for me to learn—and I do want to learn it all."

"Would you like a chocolate biscuit?"

"Thank you."

"I bought them as a treat for you, in case you passed the test. I thought you might. I don't suppose chocolate biscuits are much of a treat to you, but where I come from—*when* I come from—things like that are for special occasions."

"Chocolate biscuits here with you are more of a treat than—than *anything* anywhere else."

"You are not getting silly about me, I hope, Susan."

"About you, miss? No, I don't think so. But everything is *real* here. Everything means something. Chocolate biscuits mean something. Out there, nothing means anything."

"No, it doesn't, does it?"

"But I *am* very fond of you."

"Are you really?"

"Yes, I find I am. I didn't know it till you made me think about it just then."

"And I am fond of you, Susan. In fact, I feel as if I am in love with you."

Susan blushed. She had not known she could blush. How she was changing.

"Of course I am *not* in love with you. Please don't misunderstand me. But I have that feeling of being in love. In love with—with just having a real girl sitting on the other side of that little tea-table. I never thought I should see a real girl again. Certainly not teach one; help to form her tastes and her sensitivities, her vocabulary and her understanding. And her voice. Your accent is *so* dreadful, Susan."

"Is it?"

"Yes. Can't you hear how your mother speaks?"

"Well, nobody talks like that any more—Oh! I am sorry!" She buried her head in her hands. "I am talking like a puppet again, aren't I?"

"It takes time to cut all the strings. Your mother speaks well enough, but she is rather flat. Your grandmother spoke perfectly. It usually takes three generations to ruin a voice. It has been done *en masse*. All your contemporaries are of the third, ruined generation."

"How long does it take to regain a voice?"

"Not long, with the strap. Do you still want me to thrash you, by the way?"

"When I first came, it was all that mattered. I didn't know why it did. I still don't. It brought me here. That was the important thing. And now—now I am terribly afraid of it. Those little punishments hurt so much. Yet I *do* need it, I know I do."

"But, Miss Crawford, it is up to you. Thrash me now, or some time when you feel I deserve it, or not at all. It isn't the important thing."

"You are a good girl, Susan. But I asked you whether you *wanted* me to thrash you. I shall make the final decision, of course. I merely wish to ascertain your will in the matter."

Susan bit her lip. "I am terrified, but I really think I do."

"Very well. Go into the dining room and position yourself over the table the way you did before."

"Yes, miss."

Susan went into the cool dining room and lay her upper body across the polished wood. Her long, rustling skirts hung about her legs. Last time she had done this she was a modern girl play-act-

ing. Now she was a real girl in real stockings, with a real mistress. Her heart seemed to be beating in her throat. Her stomach felt leaden. This time there would be no last-minute escape. She knew that. It felt all too real at last.

She smelt wax polish. She hoped her breath condensing on the polished surface would not mark it. She wondered if Miss Crawford would like her to dress as a maid sometimes and clean and polish for her. She would like to do that. Really she would.

The door opened and closed. Miss Crawford was in the room.

"Make no mistake about this, Susan. It is going to hurt you a very great deal. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, miss."

"You can stand up now and go if you want to. But if you stay, I think you will be bound to me for ever."

"Oh yes, I shall, miss."

There was a rustling that sounded faint and far away. Susan realised that it was her own petticoats being lifted. Her thighs felt suddenly cool and exposed. She wondered if Miss Crawford approved of her underclothes—satiny French knickers, daring, but quite full. Not at all exposing.

"You are eighteen, Susan. You aren't an adult for three years. You'll wear elasticated legs in future."

"Yes, miss."

"Nice, plain white knickers with elasticated legs."

"Yes—Ohh!"

The first stroke fell, cutting through everything with its searing pain. Moments passed and another heavy slap broke the silence. The strap fell again and again. Susan held perfectly still, her knuckles white with gripping the table-edge, her long mid-tan legs sloping backwards, placed primly together, her dark stocking-tops gathered in pleasing swags by the low-fastened suspenders, her white thighs rapidly reddening beneath the unrelenting strap. She looked every inch a real girl. How *right* not to have touched her while she was still a cheap attempt.

The strapping continued, longer than Miss Crawford had imagined. At last poor stoic Susan cried out:

"Please, miss, I can't take any more!"

"But you *will* take more if I say you must, won't you Susan?"

"Yes, miss."

"Fifty more strokes, Susan. Harder than all the others."

Susan was silent. The strap fell with a crueller bite than any she had yet felt.

"One," counted Miss Crawford. Susan began to sob, quietly, heartbrokenly. But her long legs did not move an inch, her livid thighs stayed in position. Her pink-and-white knuckles loyally gripped the table.

The strap bit again with an almost unbelievable force. A terrible noise like a strangled shriek escaped Susan's throat. It took a minute to recover herself. Miss Crawford stood silently waiting.

"I am sorry, miss. I lost control of myself. It won't happen again."

"Two," said Miss Crawford.

Again the strap fell. Susan did not cry out but began sobbing again.

"Three," said Miss Crawford. "Stand up, Susan."

Susan came uneasily to her feet, not knowing what to expect.

"Are you not going to thank me for your punishment?"

"Thank you, miss."

"It is all over."

"But——"

"I know. It was a test. Fifty strokes was more than I could humanly expect you to bear, but I wanted to see if you would try to accept them anyway. You did."

"I *would* have accepted them, miss. If I'd *died* I would have."

"I believe you would. Perhaps you will have the chance one day, but you'll be a little stronger by then. Now go back over the table."

Susan obeyed, not knowing what was to follow, but resigned to anything.

Her rustling skirts were lifted again, and now she felt something cold and wet against her burning thighs.

"Just a little medication," said Miss Crawford. "You've some nasty marks there. This will help to soothe them."

"I don't mind. I *want* to feel them."

"Don't you want to be ready for your next beating?"

"Yes, miss."

"Now stand up and I'll show you how to put the kettle on."

"Oh, shall I put it on? Would you like me to be your maid, to pay for my tuition? I'd love to be your maid. Can I have a uniform? Is my accent improved? I am trying. But can you start teaching me tonight? You *will* show me how to appreciate music, won't you? It doesn't mean *anything* to me at the moment."

"One thing at a time, dear."

"You *are* going to adopt me, aren't you? Informally I mean. I may not be of age here, but I am out there. No one can stop me doing what I like."

"But Susan——"

"You said I'd be bound to you if I accepted your beating. Well I did accept it, and I'll accept *anything* else. So I *am* bound to you aren't I? And that means you're bound to me. It does work both ways, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does. But you're chattering like a child."

"Well, I *am* a child. I never had a childhood out there. They don't allow you one. Not a real childhood. Well, I'm going to have it now. You are going to give it to me, aren't you, Miss Crawford? I've got two Years of Grace left. Oh dear. I'm being demanding again, aren't I?"

"You are demanding things you've a right to demand—child."

"I think I'm going to put too many demands on you, Miss Crawford. I need so much, I want so much. But I *will* be your maid. I *will* work. But I may be too much for you. I am like an ocean of need, really I am."

"And I have so much to give, Susan. So much that I've never been allowed to give. I don't think you need ever worry about putting too many demands on me. Don't ever diminish, Susan. That is all I ask of you. Stay as full of needing and giving as you are, full of towering emotions beyond the understanding of puppets. And then you'll have far more than two Years of Grace, Susan. We both shall."



## *A Word About Maryhill Grammar School*

**M**ARYHILL COUNTY GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS is a 1950s-style school where grown-up girls are transformed into uniformed schoolgirls from before the collapse of civilisation.

The school convenes normally on Sunday afternoons at the Aristasian Embassy in North-East London, although there are other meetings for more advanced girls.

The most remarkable thing about the school is that it is not, in any sense, a game. Once a girl has arrived and is changed into uniform, she is regarded, by herself and others, as neither more nor less than a school-girl. The work is real, and girls are expected to learn, and to apply themselves diligently. Discipline is strict, but the atmosphere is a kind one, and most girls enjoy themselves at the School.

Uniform consists of a navy blue skirt, white blouse, regulation school tie, plain white knickers (cotton or nylon) white suspender belt (or girdle) and brassiere, black or tan-coloured stockings (three strokes of the cane is the mandatory punishment for any girl wearing tights, though this has, in fact, never happened). Shoes should be black and of a sensible design. New girls may borrow needed items of school clothing from the School's wardrobe.

Subjects studied include grammar, mathematics, geography, history, philosophy and elocution. In summer, tea is usually served to girls in the Embassy grounds after lessons are over, though they continue to be in uniform and under the guidance of the School.

Punishments for bad behaviour include lines, detention, the strap and, if necessary, the cane.

Girls find that they benefit from attendance by developing greatly improved powers of concentration, a general sharpening of the mental faculties and a more ladylike demeanour.

The history of Maryhill County Grammar dates back over twelve years to St. Bride's School in Ireland, a similar school for grown-up girls which received a lot of newspaper and television publicity at the time. Maryhill itself was depicted in the recent Channel 4 documentary *A Weekend at Miss Martindale's*.

Maryhill School exists within the feminine Empire of Aristasia and

comes under the administrative District of Maryhill, Quirinelle. It is therefore ultimately under the authority of the Maryhill District Governess and of course is governed by Aristasian law. Those who wish to know more about Aristasia in general and the District of Maryhill in particular should read the semi-fictional novel *Children of the Void* by Miss Regina Snow.

Discipline policy is very largely left to the discretion of each individual mistress. Some mistresses punish frequently, as a matter of everyday teaching procedure. Others are more sparing of the rod. These differences, we feel are legitimate variations in educational practice.

The more 'severe' mistresses will often teach for a period of time and then conduct a written test, awarding punishment to all pupils who perform inadequately. Many mistresses hold that when it is a question of short-term concentration a girl may reasonably be expected to score 100% or very little short of it, and it is a common practice to give one stroke of the strap for every incorrect answer. Some girls may receive a dozen strokes for a bad test, and there may be more than one test in a lesson.

However, it is interesting to note how quickly girls who "cannot concentrate" or "cannot memorise" learn to do so.

Such punishments are usually given with the girl bending over her desk with her skirt raised, although the strap may also be used on the hands. This is generally more feared by the girls than the use on the seat, and is, by some mistresses regarded as a more serious punishment.

Other minor offences would include talking in class, failing to stand when a mistress enters or leaves the room, failure to address a mistress correctly, untidy or incorrect uniform (non-regulation knickers, for example, are sometimes revealed when the skirt is raised for punishment, resulting in extra strokes, or even the cane).

For more serious offences such as disobedience or rudeness the cane would generally be used. Lines may also be given which a girl must complete at home.

A pupil's impressions of the school may help to make things clearer:

*I was amazed by how seriously everyone took the classes and by how once you were in there you just were a schoolgirl; nothing else. It really impressed me. It was like going into a completely different dimension of reality. I think that is why I kept coming back.*

*I was punished once on my first visit, and it was terribly real. Not just because it really hurt, but because there was no element of 'game' about it at all. I was more upset about having displeased the teacher than by the actual punishment.*

*It just feels completely natural. Much more natural than you would think. After her first visit I don't think any one thinks twice about it. Maybe during the week, when you aren't there, you think "Do I really do that?" But at the time it is the most normal thing in the world. Anything else seems strange. Sometimes I really hate changing out of uniform to go. My uniform feels like the real me. I feel a part of something. A part of Maryhill; a part of the other girls, almost.*

*There are a number of mistresses and they all have their own 'style'. Generally we learn something. Some mistresses like to discuss it, others just give tests. Tests are worse, because there are usually punishments if you don't do very well. It's amazing how well you learn to do!*

*Some mistresses bring their own strap or paddle, but usually they use the Classroom Strap, which is a long, light-coloured, two-tailed strap. It is quite heavy and it really hurts! If you get more than four you don't know how you are going to bear it. It seems to pass off quite quickly afterwards though.*

*The cane is much worse. I've only had it three times. Three strokes twice and six once. It was only a small cane, but it cuts right through you, and it goes on hurting afterwards. There are larger canes, but I've never had one. The cane isn't used very often, but a few girls get it quite a lot. They seem to get into trouble more often than most; but none of the girls is really bad (they wouldn't be allowed to keep coming if they were).*

*My worst punishment ever was when I had the heavy tawse on the hand for practically destroying a school text book. Two strokes on each hand. It was much worse than anything else. I was literally in agony at the time and it was terribly sore the next day. I really don't want to ever have a punishment like that again, but I would take it if I had to.*

*I like the security of being a schoolgirl. I also want to improve myself. I am involved in other Aristasian activities and want eventually to be a full-time Aristasian, so I see school as part of the process of making myself into an Aristasian girl.*

*Any girl interested in attending the school should telephone 0181 989 0281 and ask for Miss Martindale. Only females over the age of 18 years may apply. Please note that all staff, pupils and every one involved with the school in any capacity is female.*

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